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EDITORIAL



FIRST OF ALL, I WANT to start by wishing Don Hayter a speedy recovery from the stroke that he suffered recently. While recuperating and getting back to normal, Don is taking a break from writing his monthly column. We look forward to his return in due course, but this issue we welcome writer and automotive historian Graham Robson into the *MGE* fold. Graham has a wealth of MG experiences and a very forthright manner, so we look forward to being informed, entertained and challenged in equal measure.

On another subject, few people can have failed to hear about the diesel emissions scandal currently engulfing VW in particular, and the wider motor industry in general. We have a detailed analysis of this rapidly-changing situation in the News pages (see p12), but coincidentally we also have a diesel-powered MGB GT as our lead feature. In the light of the Dieselgate revelations I did wonder if that feature could be regarded as in bad taste, but commonsense prevailed and I figured that as the MG was a developmental dead end, its story is now a part of history and deserves to be told. Besides, this car is shrouded in mystery and we'd love to hear from anyone who knows more about its past.

And finally, whilst most enthusiasts are more than happy that the rolling exemption for cars to qualify for Historic status (and hence free road tax) has been reintroduced, this has had one unforeseen consequence. As the FBHVC explained in their newsletter: *'The previous Regulations on the display of registration marks had only ever permitted vehicles manufactured before 1973 to use black and white number plates. However, the changes to the law in 2001 which introduced the new (and current) number plate format directly linked the pre-1973 vehicles with those which were in the historic tax class (which had the same dates). This meant that when the changes to the historic tax class dates were announced in recent Budgets, this had the unintended consequence of amending the display Regulations to allow additional vehicles to display black and white plates.'* So now it seems that any car that qualifies for Historic tax can display black and white number plates. They still don't look right on post-1972 vehicles though, do they?

Simon Goldsworthy, Editor

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Two podiums for MG Triple Eight Racing at Silverstone

MG Triple Eight Racing's difficult BTCC season saw joy as well as despair on Silverstone's National circuit, with two fine podium finishes marred by the unluckiest of punctures.

The British Touring Car Championship neared the end of its 2015 season on the Silverstone National circuit on 27 September, but while some things became clearer after a turbulent three races, there was still everything to play for in the final rounds on 11 October at Brands Hatch.

In qualifying at Silverstone, it was Mat Jackson in the ballast-free Ford Focus who secured pole position, but championship

leader Gordon Shedden did very well to put his heavily laden Honda Civic (carrying 75kg of ballast) in second spot. In the MGs, Andrew Jordan qualified a good fourth and Jack Goff was ninth, but the real surprise was Jason Plato in the VW Passat. He has been the man to beat for much of the year, but his championship charge has started to falter as the season enters its final phase. This time a combination of traffic and engine problems meant that

tenth place was the best he could manage.

In Race One, Jordan quickly picked up one place as Tordoff wobbled in the BMW, then on lap two he used the soft tyres to good advantage, powering past the ballast-laden Shedden and into second. Goff also started well, passing Matt Neal in the second Yuasa Honda before then heading straight into the pits. This appeared to be a tactical decision on the part of the MG driver, a variation on the themes of starting from the pit lane or the back of the grid by choice. This has come about because of the rule change for this season that sees grid positions for the second race of each meeting determined by the fastest lap times set by each driver in Race One. Time will tell if this epidemic of tactical driving will require further rule changes for next season, but it worked for Goff. Yes he threw away possible points from Race One, but he would start Race Two ballast-free from second place on the grid.

Meanwhile, everyone else still had places to race for. Jordan was unable to close the gap to race leader Jackson, but while Shedden got close enough to threaten the MG man in the closing stages, they maintained position to the end - Shedden was never going to risk his third place with a desperate lunge, not least because Plato, his nearest rival in the championship, was having a torrid time back in 11th. And it got worse for the Volkswagen driver, a puncture on the final lap sending him spinning down the order.

Race Two saw Jackson again starting from pole, with Goff alongside him. Jordan

Pictures: BTCC.net



was fifth on the grid, one place ahead of Shedden while Plato – with a new engine fitted – would have to battle his way up from 11th. In the event he had a good race and dragged the VW up the order to finish 7th, but that was not enough as Shedden extended his lead further by finishing fourth.

The MGs had a mixed race. Goff lost a place to Andy Priaulx in the fast-starting BMW as soon as the lights went out, but then settled down to hold his place well. He even controlled a lurid slide on lap 7 after a tap from behind by Aaron Smith, and was rewarded by being gifted back his second place after Jackson suffered a puncture. At this point the MGs were running strongly in second and fourth, and having both MG drivers on the same podium looked a distinct possibility. Unfortunately it was not to be, a puncture for Jordan on the final lap ruining his race and his day, though Goff held on to post MG's second podium of the meet.

The draw for the reverse grid in Race Three saw Colin Turkington starting from third, one place ahead of VW teammate Plato. Shedden was back in seventh, Goff ninth and poor old Andy Jordan back in 19th. In a typical Race Three mêlée, there was contact throughout the field as drivers threw caution to the wind. Goff was unlucky to be barged out of the way resulting in suspension damage that ended his day, but Jordan managed to climb to 12th. Meanwhile Plato clawed back a championship point by staying ahead of Shedden to claim fourth place, despite the Scotsman having teammate Matt Neal protecting his back brilliantly while he tried to figure a way past the VW.

Andrew Jordan said of the day: 'It was a case of what might have been. The puncture in Race Two ruined our weekend – two more corners and it would have been a cracking result with 66kgs of ballast on board. That's the way it goes – I honestly thought we were on for a good weekend because the pace was good. My aim was to be third in the championship and without what happened in Race Two we'd have been on for that going into Brands Hatch. It was good to come through in Race Three, but we nailed the tyres. We're still going to try and go for third, but it's going to be tough – we need to have three solid races at Brands and we'll see where that puts us.'

The top of the drivers table looked as follows after Silverstone:

- 1. Shedden (Honda Yuasa Racing) 325**
- 2. Plato (Team BMR RCIB Insurance) 302**
- 3. Turkington (BMR RCIB Insurance) 293**
- 4. Neal (Honda Yuasa Racing) 288**
- 5. Jordan (MG Triple Eight Racing) 261**

Theoretically all five drivers are still in with a mathematical chance of winning the Championship at Brands Hatch, but the advantage seems to have swung firmly from Plato to Shedden, though of course anything can happen in racing.



Mechanix Midget ready to hit the road

You may remember the Haynes Mechanix project Midget from our February issue's News pages. This was going to be rebuilt in Islington under the leadership of the Prospex youth charity, whose staff would help local youngsters to learn mechanical and life skills in the process. Well, now this mammoth task has been completed and the car was unveiled to friends, family, sponsors and the press by guests of honour J Haynes (Chairman of Haynes Publishing) and Kat Fletcher, Deputy Mayor of Islington, on 15 September.

Between December 2014 and July 2015 the Midget had been transformed from an abandoned wreck to a very smart and drivable car in a striking new livery. As well as learning mechanical and life skills, the young people involved in the project also earned two potentially valuable qualifications: a BTEC in Service and Maintenance of Road Vehicles, and also an Edexcel Entry Level 3 award in Social and Personal Development.

The Midget was the latest in an ongoing series of Mechanix projects run by Prospex, and we shall have a full feature report in the next issue looking at their work, at this car and at future plans to roll the scheme out across the UK.

MG joins the 'House of Cars' in Bridgend

Nathaniel Cars, known locally in Bridgend as the House of Cars, was the latest dealer to join the MG franchise when it went live on 1 October. The Wales based family-run garage, which was established by Wayne Griffiths 35 years ago, is now run by him and his son Nathan. Both Wayne and Nathan Griffiths are very excited to be adding MG to their existing three franchises, and Nathan said: 'We can't wait to start selling MGs. We think the model range offers exceptional value for money and has a huge potential. It's also great to be selling such an iconic British brand, something I'm sure our customers will feel a sense of pride in too. We're really excited about the range and love the MG3 because you're getting so much. We think our customers are really going to enjoy playing around with the options available.'

Nathaniel Cars currently sells around 1200 units a year through its Mitsubishi, Great Wall and Subaru

franchises from their premises at David Street, Bridgend Industrial Estate, Bridgend CF31 3SA - see more at www.nathanielcars.co.uk



Footman James' Open Day

Footman James hosted an open day at its West Midlands headquarters in Dudley on 17 September to celebrate its new offices, to thank staff for its continued growth and to offer club members the chance to bring along their classics and network with Footman James employees and each other. Special guests during the day also included the Mayor and Mayoress of Dudley, Steve and Jayne Waltho.

The Mayor said: 'The Mayoress and I were delighted to be invited to the Open Day and share the hospitality of Footman James with staff and customers. It was wonderful to see the vintage vehicles, and great to see a modern thriving business moving into Dudley and celebrating by opening its doors to the local community.'

David Bond, Footman James' Director said: 'This was our first event in our new offices and it was a real success, offering a chance for our staff and customers to talk all things classic. It was wonderful to have so many of our clubs in attendance with a fantastic collection of bikes and cars. 2015 has been a good year at Footman James - long may it continue!'

■ For further information about Footman James please contact 0333 207 6000 or visit www.footmanjames.co.uk.



Tow Car award for the MG6

We always knew at MGE that the MG6 offered a lot of car for the money, and now its towing abilities have been recognised by those who know best - the Caravan Club. During rigorous testing that took place in July at the Millbrook Proving Ground, the MG6 S wowed judges and was named winner of the Under £17,500 class at the Caravan Club Tow Car of the Year awards event in September.

For this year's competition, which is in its 33rd year, the cars were split into seven price classes and two weight categories. The classes were vehicles priced under £17,500, £17,500-£22,000, £22,000-£26,000, £26,000-£30,000, £30,000-£40,000 and over £50,000. Manufacturers were invited to submit for testing any vehicle that was capable of towing a trailer over 750kg and would be for sale on 1 October, 2015. The cars entered were pushed to their limits in a series of tests. Five expert drivers assessed

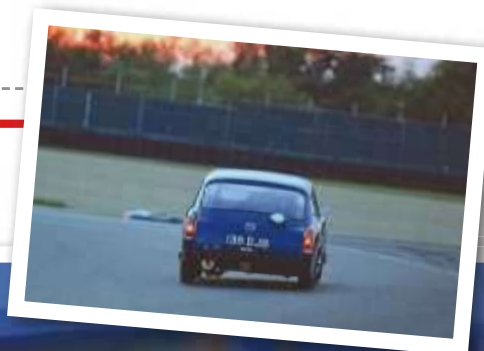
each car's towing characteristics including acceleration, braking and the ability to cope with demanding hill starts. A further two driving judges performed mid-range 30-60mph and 40-60mph acceleration tests on each vehicle, while an additional two judges then evaluated each entrant's usability in terms of everyday caravanning, for example would it carry a set of awning poles and whether the caravaner is required to get on the floor to connect the caravan electrics.

Judges comments were: 'This keenly-priced, front wheel drive MG surprised a few judges with its more-than-capable towing performance around the challenging Millbrook course. It boasts a generous 100kg nose weight limit and impressive boot space. The hill start was very good for a front wheel drive car.'

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

This month, Colin Murrell has selected this superb night time shot of a K3 at Classic Le Mans last July. Taken at 10.08pm, due to the lack of light a 70-200 f2.8 lens was used at 200mm, as usual for Colin on the Canon 5D3. The shutter speed was 1/125 sec, the aperture was f2.8 and the ISO 5000.

That ISO of 5000 is very high to compensate for the lack of light (ISO 100-400 would be more normal in daylight), but it still allows for some very fine definition. That is largely because the lens has such a wide aperture to let the light in quickly. Such lenses are expensive, and most of us will have to make do with much smaller openings (the higher the f number, the smaller the opening). To show what difference that can make, we have also included a shot of a Jacobs Midget Coupé Colin took at the Oldtimer Grand Prix in Germany. This was the last race on the Saturday night, and was taken at 8:49pm. Colin says: 'I used the 100-400mm zoom lens at 400mm, as the corner was quite a long way away from me. The disadvantage of using the 100-400 in poor light at 400mm is that the aperture will only be f5.6, and so at 1/500 sec the ISO was bumped right up to 12,800 to compensate. That is why the image appears grainy rather than pin sharp.'



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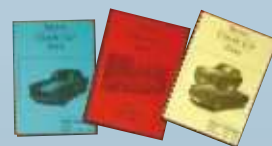


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Four car ZS team contests the Birkett Six Hour Relay

The Birkett Six Hour Relay is a long-standing tradition from the 750 Motor Club who describe it as 'a little bit of end of season fun to many, but also a challenge to the competitive instincts of many racing drivers and the strategic wiles of a few team managers!'. The premise is simple enough – 70 teams of between four and six drivers and sports or saloon cars each have to lap the circuit as many times as they can within the six hours, with only one of their team cars running at any one time.

This year's event is being held on the GP circuit at Silverstone on 24 October, and MG fans will have a particular reason to go because a team of four ZSs based on cars from the MGCC Cockshoot Cup Championship will be competing for honours. Peter Burchill told us: 'We have entered the Birkett to raise the profile of MG ZS racing and of the MGCC Cockshoot Cup. The ZS is a superb basis for a track car

as the handling in standard trim is good and the V6 has plenty of power. We formed Vulcan Racing to support and develop the cars under the tight technical regulations of the championship to get reliable cars that perform well, and this year one of our supported MGF VVCs won its class in the Cockshoot Cup. We have entered the Birkett under the Cockshoot Cup banner to promote the series. We will be facing stiff competition in the Birkett as we will be grouped with cars having larger engines and from more modified series and championships. However, we have all been racing the cars for many years and we feel confident that we can put on a good show.'

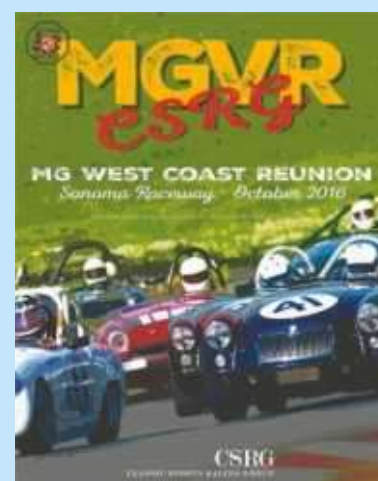
You can follow updates on the web at www.vulcanracing.co.uk, and the team would love to see some fellow MG enthusiasts at the event – you would be welcome to come and chat to them in the garages during the event.



MG Live! 2016

The MG Car Club has announced the provisional dates for MG Live! 2016 – Silverstone, the home of British motorsport, will be hosting the annual MG party on the 4th and 5th of June 2016. The entire weekend will be filled with attractions for everyone, with 1000s of Britain's best-loved sports cars and two days full of racing action on Silverstone's historic Grand Prix circuit.

Planning for MG Live! has already begun in earnest, so stay tuned to www.mgcc.co.uk for updates and news in the coming months. More information on tickets will be announced soon.



Double the fun in 2016 for MGVR

The MG Vintage Racers of North America will have both Mid-West and West Coast Focus Events for 2016, as they celebrate their 35th anniversary. In this their 20th year of Focus Events, their 2016 designated Mid-West Focus Event will be at the Waterford Hills Racetrack in Clarkston, Michigan on the weekend of 29-31 July, while the designated West Coast Focus Event will be with CSRG at Sonoma Raceway, in Sonoma California over the weekend of September 30 - October 2. For more information on the MG Vintage Racers, visit www.MGVR.org.

One for him and one for her

One very happy couple from North Essex is now driving around in style after they decided to treat themselves to a brand new MG6 – each! Mr and Mrs MG, (previously known as Paul and Ann,) bought their new MG6s from their local dealer, Roy Tolley MG in Colchester, Essex, after seeing them on display in July at the local Tending Show in Manningtree. Both were really impressed with the car's appearance, handling and comfort. The only thing they couldn't agree on was the colour, so they got one each!



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Testing times for diesel cars

There's only one story in the motor industry this month - the Volkswagen emissions crisis. Paul Gilligan gives us his assessment of its implications from inside the industry.

As you can't have failed to hear, VW have been caught by the US Environmental Protection Agency cheating to ensure their diesel cars passed official emission tests. The cars were all fitted with a clever piece of software that detected when they were being tested rather than driven normally - all tests are carried out on rolling roads, so the fact that the front wheels were doing 60mph and the backs were not moving was enough for the ECU to say 'I'm being tested' and switch the car to a clean mode. Performance drops significantly, but so do emissions, so much so that the true nitrous oxide emissions are 40 times as high as the laboratory tests show. This applies to VW diesel engines that passed the Euro 5 tests, not the latest Euro 6 engines introduced a few months ago.

It's been common knowledge in the industry for years that official mpg figures are pretty meaningless because frankly the manufacturers cheat the testing process. However, this latest revelation is something entirely different. It affects 482,000 VW Group cars in the US, and a total worldwide of around 11 million cars and vans. The big thing we don't know is whether VW are the only guilty party, or if others have also been cheating the tests.

Frankly it would be almost incredible for others not to be guilty, in part at least. Most manufacturers produce mainstream engines which offer similar performance, economy and emissions. If VW managed to report emissions 97.5% less than reality and the others were all reporting similar emissions without cheating, then their engines are 40 times more efficient than

VW's. Sorry, I can't buy that one.

So I think there's a lot more to come out affecting other manufacturers. Rumours are that BMW developed their engines with a different technology to VW, and may be clean. I'm told on good authority that the BBC *Watchdog* programme was already working on exposing another large European manufacturer for their conduct in emissions testing. MG are not currently implicated, though the situation is fluid and they will still feel the impact of the fallout. But what will all this cost VW? In simple terms a very great deal, maybe even the company. The US government can fine them per car sold (so up to \$18 billion) and owners can sue for misrepresentation and loss of value of their cars. This could be massive, and ambulance-chasing lawyers are already circling. The drop in value of used VWs is another enormous problem. In the US, VW have instructed their dealers to stop selling affected used diesels as well as new ones. Late on 30 September, the same thing happened in the UK. I did some approximate numbers and reckon the UK car leasing companies could be facing a loss of at least £1 billion; they will be looking to VW to pick up the tab.

Dealers have been badly affected with people cancelling orders. VW in the US are already providing financial support to dealers, and although this hadn't happened in the UK at the time of writing, it can't be far away. VW dealers will face reduced profits for years to come, and if VW don't support them financially some will fail.

Even after customers and dealers have been compensated and all the fines paid, if VW can survive financially there is an even

bigger problem - the future of the brand.

It's enormously successful, now the world's biggest motor manufacturer, and one of the key strengths has been that VW have been perceived as very reliable, producing cars that people can trust. That trust has gone. Sales will slow and it will take years to rebuild the brand. (Anyone remember Ratners?) Of course a lot depends on how many other manufacturers are found to have been cheating. If most are guilty, then that will actually help VW recover.

On a wider note, could this spell the death of diesel cars? Diesels were already under attack because of emissions, with *The Sunday Times* having run a campaign against them for several months now. The VW scandal can only focus interest and provide ammunition for those opposed to diesels. Improvements in technology in recent years also mean that the fuel consumption gap between petrol and diesel has closed significantly, so a shift towards petrol now seems inevitable. This is of particular concern to French manufacturers who are very reliant on diesels - 80% of cars sold in France are diesel compared to 50% in the UK. Switzerland has already banned 'temporarily' the sale of new Audi, Seat, Skoda and VW diesel cars in the Euro 5 category in their country...

What happens next? To say this is a fast moving situation is an understatement and new revelations will inevitably have emerged by the time you read this. So far, the VW boss has resigned (though his £44 million compensation package must have been some consolation) and other senior executives are rumoured to be leaving soon. A new boss has been appointed promising to clean the whole thing up and rebuild the brand. Whatever vast sum he's paid, he'll earn it in the next few years.

The rest depends a great deal on what else is uncovered, particularly involving other manufacturers. If many more are found guilty, this can only speed the decline of diesel. At the same time it would increase the crippling compensation the industry is forced to pay. Whatever happens, I think there is a lot more to unfold about this story. To everyone who's asked me about it in the past week I've said simply: 'You ain't seen nothing yet!'

■ Paul Gilligan has spent his working life in the motor industry, holding senior positions in dealerships and running a leasing company with a fleet of 13,500 vehicles. He now runs his own company, Gilligan Vehicle Contracts, offering fleet management solutions to business users, and arranging the acquisition of new and near-new cars and commercial vehicles for private and business users.





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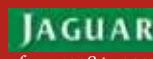
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A superb ZB Magnette's time to shine

£16,500 for a ZB Magnette seems like strong money, but when you read the history we think you'll agree that it was a real bargain.

The theory that an Aston Martin failing to make far more than its estimate would herald a market crash was tested by Silverstone Auctions in early September. One of the lots in question was a 1968 DB6 Vantage Volante, which carried a guide price of £825-925,000. On recent form this would have translated into a hammer price of over a million, but (gasp) it 'only' made £900,000. Meanwhile, a '63 DB4 with a £675,000-£750,000 estimate failed to sell. Other Astons and Ferraris also either made relatively modest prices or were unsold. So is this the beginning of the end, or just a temporary setback while all the investors change the oil in their automotive portfolios?

Interestingly, September saw the inaugural sale of yet another auction house. Classics Central is the name, based in Notts but with sales held at Bedford. Just over 50 cars were included, biased to the more affordable end of the market it was welcome to see. As it happened the MG faction didn't do very well, with a 1961 MGA and a '77 BGT resto falling short of reserve, while a variety of 'project' Fs and TFs didn't get past three figures.

RM Sothebys fared rather better with their Astons and Ferraris, and also did well with pre-war MGs. £151,000 bought what's believed to be the only surviving 'Dancing Daughters' all-female works team PA/B, as

seen at the 1934 Le Mans. Billed with a similar estimate, a 1959 MGA Twin Cam with a globe-trotting history didn't tempt the crowd.

Bonhams has also been in action, selling six out of nine MGs at Brooklands. A no reserve late B in de-bumpered trim made £4032, almost the same as a 1968 model that was born and bred with chrome, while a '73 Roadster topped the lot at £5320, although still lower than forecast. A C roadster went for £11,200, while an MGA TC almost reached £30k.

For those of a DIY bent, a part-restored 1929 M-Type looked ideal, but not at the £14-£17k asking price, it seems. The same fate awaited two more pre-war cars, a '31 F-Type Magna and '36 NB Magnette. Both had a £45-£55k estimate. That left the 1937 VA to take the highest price MG honours - £30,800 was well over the expected £22-£28k.

CCA at Carfest hit the headlines because of the Chris Evans Ferrari link, but you didn't have to be a rich celeb to attend the auction. A solid £4510 bagged a late TF with very low miles, but two BGT LEs missed the mark (too many around perhaps, spoiling the investment potential?). A gleaming '65 MGB ragtop fetched a healthy £12,100, but a TD and a Mk1 MGA Roadster ran out of steam before reaching their reserves.

Brightwells once again



assembled over 200 lots for September, mostly cars but with a few motorcycles, tractors and a couple of classic speedboats thrown in for luck. Most of the 13 MGs on offer were the common crop of Midgets, Bs and As, so Lot 79, a 1958 Magnette stood out from the crowd. Astonishingly, it had only covered 16,000 miles from new, all in the hands of the same Scottish family. The vendor's grandfather bought it for £840 plus purchase tax from Duthie & Son Ltd in Montrose. By 1966, when it was passed on in his will, the Magnette had only clocked 4460 miles. The new keeper, an RAF pilot, kept a detailed diary of every trip made in the next 22 years.

The vendor inherited the car in 1995 with 11,349 miles showing. It has been used infrequently over the last two decades, covering fewer than 5000 miles, all documented by old MoTs. About the only non-standard part is the stainless steel exhaust, the leather seats and trim having been protected by covers from new. Recently on show at the Gaydon Motor Museum, five new tyres have been fitted, but the original spare is still unused... probably not a good idea to try it after 57 years!

In recent times ZB prices have been rising, but generally stay well below the £10k barrier. Obviously this example was more than a bit special, making any sort of estimate tricky. In the event, the hammer descended at £16,500, which must be an absolute bargain, particularly in comparison to all



Not many Magnettes left in such fine and original shape.

those million quid Astons and Ferraris. The only problem the new owner faces is the sad fact that using his MG for more than a few miles a year might spoil its time warp qualities.

For shallower pockets, £1500 (plus commission) bought a perfectly respectable and ready to use Midget 1500, or alternatively a B 'rolling shell'. The latter was of 1965 vintage, imported from the USA. As the catalogue pointed out, a new Heritage shell is near the £10k mark now, so a relatively unruined original built by Abingdon using almost new tooling is a good option.

The only non-seller was a US-import MGA drop top, ripe for restoration with an £8000 estimate. A pair of operational open MGAs made £15,500 and £17,500. No BGTs this time, but a gaggle of Roadsters made between £3000 and £4800. Unusually, the cheapie was the 1970 model and the late rubber buffer cars made more.

Apart from the £1500 Midget, an immaculate 1974 MkIII, fully rebuilt using a new Heritage shell around 15 years ago, was hammered down for £9800. After commission, that's well into five-figure territory, which is very good going for a Midget of any year.



1970 chrome B Roadster made £3000.



Hammer fell at £1500 for MGB project.



£9800 bid for Heritage reshell Midget.

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Sealey vehicle service promotion catalogue

Price: Free

Sealey Tools' Vehicle Service promotion runs to the end of December, and their dedicated catalogue offers 24 pages of products concentrating on servicing tools and equipment. It features a host of new products such as a 13-piece body panel levering kit and a compact 12v digital battery tester, as well as established favourites such as timing lights, compression testers and claw-type oil filter wrenches. Copies are available direct from Sealey stockists, or you can view online at www.sealey.co.uk

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If, following adjustment of the hood and drop glass, your MGF or TF still leaks water down the door cards and over the speaker bezels, the fault may be due to distortion of the door cheaters. The critical area is where the seal meets the door glass and windscreen. As a last resort when under warranty, MG-Rover dealers would replace the cheaters to cure the problem. Fortunately MGOC Spares stocks original door cheaters suitable for both MGF and TF models under part numbers CFE103020 and CFE103030. To order, telephone 01954 230928 or visit www.mgocspares.co.uk



Near the Motorways

by Hugh Cantlie

Published in UK by Cheviot Books

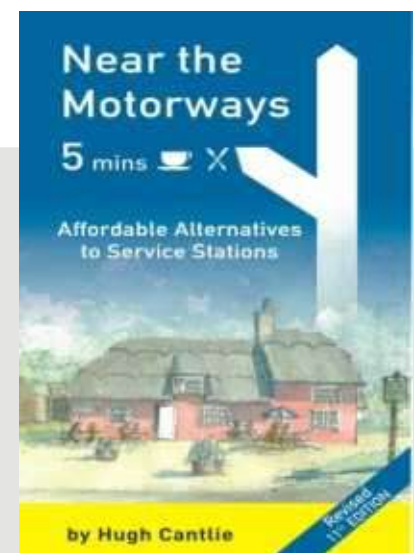
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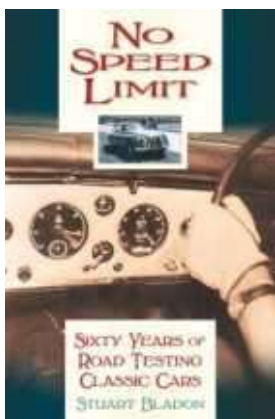
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Near the Motorways describes over 200 inns, restaurants or hotels within five minutes of a motorway exit, providing you with a wide range of dining alternatives to motorway service stations. Each entry has been personally selected by the author, and this new

11th edition includes some 88 amendments. Offering quick-to-access and easy-to-understand maps, illustrations and details including websites, email addresses and post codes for SatNavs, times for food are given with a price guide and an index of gardens, houses and places of interest nearby. We have used previous editions and can thoroughly recommend it – handy and concise, it should be kept by the bedside table or in the car's glovebox, and is particularly useful for when the internet is unobtainable. Readily available from local bookshops, or on-line from W. H. Smith, Waterstones or Amazon.





No Speed Limit

Sixty Years of Road Testing Classic Cars
By Stuart Bladon
Paperback, www.thehistorypress.co.uk, £14.99

Stuart Bladon first drove a car (with his aunt's help) at the age of seven and developed an enduring love of life behind the wheel. During his 60-year career as a motoring journalist - 26 of which were spent at *Autocar* magazine - he road-tested thousands of models and experienced many major changes to the way we drive and the vehicles we do it in. He was the first person to be issued with a parking ticket in the UK, the second to pass the advanced driving test of the Institute of Advanced Motorists, and drove all the way along the first 70 miles of the M1 while it was under construction in 1959. Often flying cars out to Belgium to test them on their straight roads or motoring to the Alps to ascertain the car's road-holding qualities, Stuart had many close shaves during his career including run-ins with the law and brushes with death. This book recounts the best of his adventures and features 70 classic cars from the Morris 8 to the Jaguar E Type, and including the MGB.

MGA and Z-Type Magnette catalogue

Price: £5

If you fancy a little enjoyable reading now that the nights are drawing in, the latest edition of NTG Motor Services' catalogue might be just the ticket! Covering the MGA and the ZA/ZB Magnettes, it features many new items as well as detailed illustrations. And when your resolve weakens and you can no longer resist the urge to buy, you'll find it all backed up by very large stocks and helpful advice via telephone. NTG Motor Services are at 282-284 Bramford Road, Ipswich IP1 4AY. Alternatively call 01473 406031 or visit www.mgbits.com



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This stainless steel crankcase (or valve cover) breather from Pipercross has been designed to fit onto existing engine crankcase breathers and oil catch tank. Made in the UK of sintered stainless steel, its rubber inlet neck with a simple clamp mechanism for securing and a built in stepped neck fits 13, 16 or 19mm pipework. The filter inside is infinitely reusable, and easily cleanable, making it perfect for high-stress track day and motorsport use. For more details on the Pipercross range, visit www.thepipercrossshop.co.uk



MG3 upgrades

Price: Scorpion exhaust £378 / lowering springs £216

It seems that if MG won't uprate the MG3, then the aftermarket is stepping in to fill the gap. These two new products are from Knight Industries, both made in the UK. The exhaust is from Scorpion, and on a rolling road it boosted power from a maximum at the flywheel in standard trim of 102.2Hp to an impressive 111.5Hp. A complimentary induction kit is rumoured to be on the way, but also available now are lowering springs that provide a one inch drop. Email Info@knightind.co.uk, call 07891 067759 or collect from Unit 2, Bridge Street Industrial Estate, Bridge Street, Uttoxeter, Staffs ST14 5EA.



Garmin dash cams

Price: £129.99-£159.99

Garmin has announced the launch of the new Dash Cam 30 and Dash Cam 35. These two high-definition standalone driving recorders easily mount to a windshield and record footage in a continuous loop, serving as a driver's true eyewitness on the road. The Incident Detection (G-sensor) automatically saves video footage on impact. On the Dash Cam 35, new driver alerts also offer helpful warnings that encourage safer driving behaviour. Helpful driver awareness features include forward collision warnings, which provide alerts to users when they are driving too closely to the vehicle ahead. Garmin Dash Cam models are available with and without GPS. The GPS-enabled Dash Cam 35 allows the camera to label footage with date, time, latitude, longitude and speed so that customers know exactly when and where events take place. The date and time may be manually set on Dash Cam 30. Video footage is stored on the replaceable microSD memory card, which is included in the price. Both Dash Cam 30 and 35 accept microSD cards of up to 64GB. For more information, visit www.garmin.com



OCTOBER 17**Drawing from Automotive History**

Heritage Motor Centre, Gaydon. Spend the day at the museum learning new drawing skills with Richard Cook, an art teacher and accomplished pen and ink sketcher. £35 per person. Call 01926 645029, or see www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk

OCTOBER 17-18**Solway Autumn Classic**

West Cumbria. Incorporating the Copeland Canter Tour on Saturday and the Solway Historic and Targa Rallies on the Sunday. See www.wigtonmc.co.uk for full details.

OCTOBER 18**Fifteenth North American Cecil Kimber Run**

A British car tour through the beautiful Skylands region of northwest New Jersey with lunch and a few surprises on route. Open to all British cars. Call 908-713-6251 or email mgdriversclub@hotmail.com

OCTOBER 18**Garstang Autojumble**

Hamilton House Farm, Garstang, Preston, Lancs PR3 0TB. 9am-1pm, indoor and outdoor pitches available. 01772 323654 (6-8pm). www.garstangautojumbles.co.uk

OCTOBER 24**Cars Through the Lens**

Heritage Motor Centre, Gaydon. Develop your automotive photography skills with photographer Lara Platman. £35 per person. Call 01926 645029, email: shows@heritage-motor-centre.co.uk or see www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk

OCTOBER 24-NOVEMBER 1**Crafty Arty Autos**

Heritage Motor Centre, Gaydon. Half-term fun celebrating Family Arts Festival and the Big Draw. Call 01926 645029, email: shows@heritage-motor-centre.co.uk or see www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk

OCTOBER 25**Malvern Autumn Classic Car Show**

Severn Hall and outside, Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcs. WR13 6NW. Includes classic commercials. 01484 667776, www.classicshows.org

OCTOBER 25**Rixton Autojumble**

Manchester Road, Warrington WA3 6EA. Starts 7am, indoor and outdoor all-weather autojumble. No need to book. 07860 648103.

OCTOBER 25**Kettle Autojumble**

Church Farm, Kettleburgh, near Wodbridge, IP13 7LF. Open 8am-2pm. Call 01728 724858 before 9pm.

OCTOBER 25**Huddersfield Autojumble**

Old Market Building, Brook Street, Huddersfield HD1 1RG. Opens 10am. 01773 819154. www.phoenixfairs.jimdo.com

OCTOBER 30-NOVEMBER 1**Alexandra Palace Classic Car Show**

Alexandra Palace, London N22 7AY. Part of the London Classic Car Week. 0208 365 2121, www.alexandrapalace.com

OCTOBER 31**Lincoln Autojumble**

Hemswell, DN21 5TJ. Stalls from £10, parking £2 and entry is free. Site opens for stallholders at 6:30am and to the public at 8am. 07816 291544, www.lincolnautojumble.com

NOVEMBER 1**Penrith Autojumble**

Penrith Auction Mart, Skirsgill, CA11 0DN. All hardstanding plots indoor and outdoor £10. 9am-1pm. Admission £3. 01772 323654 (6pm-8pm), www.garstangautojumbles.co.uk

NOVEMBER 1**London to Brighton Veteran Car Run**

Starting from Hyde Park, London and finishing at Madeira Drive, Brighton. The

Auction calendar

Auction details can sometimes change at short notice. Readers are advised to confirm dates, venues and viewing arrangements before travelling.

Oct 24: Richard Edmonds, Allington, near Chippenham, SN14 6LJ. Tel: 01249 444544, www.richardedmondsauctions.com

Oct 24: Mathewsons, Thornton le Dale, N Yorks YO18 7LH. Tel: 01751 474455, www.mathewsons.co.uk

Oct 27: Barons, Sandown Park, Esher, Surrey KT10 9AJ.

Tel: 023 8066 8413, www.barons-auctions.com

Oct 30: SWVA, 61 Ringwood Road, Parkstone, Poole BH14 ORG. Tel: 01202 745466, www.swva.co.uk

Nov 7: Anglia Car Auctions, Beveridge Way, King's Lynn PE30 4NB. Tel: 01553 771881, www.angliacarauctions.co.uk

Nov 8: Charterhouse, Bath & West S'ground, Shepton Mallet BA4 6QN. 01935 812277, www.charterhouse-auction.com

Nov 14-15: Silverstone Auctions, NEC Classic Motor Show. 01926 691141, www.silverstoneauctions.com

Nov 18: H&H, Donington Park, Castle Donington, Derby DE74 2RP. Tel: 01925 210035, www.classic-auctions.com

Nov 25: Brightwells, Easters Court, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0DE. Tel: 01568 611122, www.brightwells.com

Nov 28: Historics, Brooklands, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 0QN. Tel: 01753 639170, www.historics.co.uk

Dec 5: CCA, Warwickshire Exhibition Centre, Leamington Spa CV31 1XN. Tel: 01926 640888, www.classiccarauctions.co.uk

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NOVEMBER 7**Rufforth Autojumble**

Rufforth Park, Wetherby Road, YO23 3QF. For more details see www.rufforthautojumble.com or call 01904 738620.

NOVEMBER 7-8**Footman James Classic Vehicle Restoration Show**

Royal Bath & West Showground. Club stands, privately entered vehicles, trade stands, autojumble and Charterhouse auction. www.carsandevents.com

NOVEMBER 8**Rixton Autojumble**

Manchester Road, Warrington WA3 6EA. Starts 7am, indoor and outdoor all-weather autojumble. No need to book. 07860 648103.

NOVEMBER 8**Garstang Autojumble**

Hamilton House Farm, Garstang, Preston, Lancs PR3 0TB. 9am-1pm, indoor and

outdoor pitches. 01772 323654 (6pm-8pm). www.garstangautojumbles.co.uk

NOVEMBER 10**Classic Car Night**

Ace Cafe London, Ace Corner, Stonebridge, London NW10 7UD. Includes Midget and Sprite Club monthly meet from 6pm. 020 8961 1000, www.acecafeevents.com

NOVEMBER 13-15**Lancaster Insurance Classic Motor Show**

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NOVEMBER 15**Newark Autojumble**

Newark Showground, Notts NG24 2NY. Early bird admission from 8am £10, standard admission from 10am £6, under 12s free. 01507 529470, www.newarkautojumble.co.uk

The *MG Enthusiast Events Diary* is a FREE service to publicise your event. We want to include details of ALL events whether big, small, formal or informal just so long as MGs are welcome. To be included, we need the following information:

Date • Event name • Venue • Brief two-line description • Contact details

Please send details of your events to: MG Enthusiast Events Diary, Kelsey Media, PO Box 978, Peterborough PE1 9FL or email:

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Beijing - Inextricably linked to its glorious, notorious past, yet hurtling towards a power-charged future, Beijing is one of China's great cities. It is as complex as it is compelling, food is an obsession for the Chinese and the dazzling array of different dishes you'll encounter in Beijing reflects the sheer joy locals take in eating. There are six Unesco world heritage sites in this city alone, at its heart is the magnificent Forbidden City, a royal palace on a scale like no other and, to cap it all, the awe-inspiring Great Wall of China snakes its way across the hills just north of city.

Xi'an - Located in central China, Xi'an records the changes of the country just like a living history book. Called Chang'an (meaning the eternal city) in ancient times, it is one of the birthplaces of the ancient Chinese civilization in the Yellow River Basin area. As the eastern terminal of the Silk Road and the site of the famous Terracotta Warriors of the Qin Dynasty, the city has won a reputation all over the world.

Shanghai - Situated on the estuary of Yangtze River, Shanghai serves as the most influential economic and financial center in Eastern China. It is also a popular destination for visitors to sense the pulsating development of the country. New skyscrapers and old Shikumen together draw the skyline of the city. Western customs and Chinese traditions intertwined and formed the city's culture, making a visitor's stay truly memorable.

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It's third time lucky at Spa

This story began back in 2011 when Steve Hall asked my son, Robert, if he would like to share an MGB in the one hour race at the Spa Historic in June. Everyone agreed it would be a great lads' weekend, so Dave Hill organised it and the usual Hall's Garage suspects duly set off for Spa in the Transit bus with trailer attached. The weekend passed without a problem and everyone got a buzz out of playing with GT40s, Cobras, Mustangs etc.

At this point enthusiasm overcame common sense. 'How about doing the 6 hour race next year?' Steve was heard to say. Oh what a good idea! So Dave Hill once again organised ferries, hotels and everything else for September 2012. Adrian Beer was drafted in as driver number three and we agreed to share a garage with Barry Sidery-Smith, who each year runs a Belgium-registered MGB.

Practice went well and we started the race with high hopes, but before Steve had finished the first driving stint, he was involved in an accident triggered by a Lotus Elan. The Lotus and our MGB both retired on the spot.

Come 2013 and we were silly enough to have another go at the 6 hour, which is a long time to push an engine to the limit. Once more Dave took the role of team manger and organised the weekend, but this time Adam Key joined Rob and Steve

in the driver line up.

Steve's two hour stint went OK, but half way through Rob's spell he broke a halfshaft exiting La Source hairpin. Too late for the pit entry, Rob coasted to the pit exit where, after some negotiation with the pit exit marshals, they agreed that if he could push the MGB back up the pit exit road unaided, the car could be recovered.

As some of you may know, the old pit exit road is very steep. With us cheering

him on, Rob managed to get it over the line and we could then join in and push the car backwards up to our pit. With the halfshaft changed, Rob rejoined the race before handing over to Adam. All went well until Adam pitted in the last hour when the car shed its crankshaft nut. In allowing the pulley to come loose, the drive key was badly damaged and try as we might, we couldn't repair the damage and fit a replacement nut. Retirement number two. >



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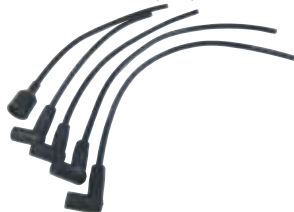


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2014 slipped quietly by before the words 'unfinished business' were being muttered for 2015. Sure enough Dave did the hard work with the bookings, and once again we set off for Spa. All went well in Thursday testing and Friday qualifying, until Robert pitted after his qualifying session and an eagle-eyed pit lane marshal saw that he had a T-shirt under his dual layer Nomex race suit, not his Nomex vest. A trip to see the stewards got us a 30 second start penalty. Out of 110 starters, we had qualified 86th. I told Rob it was just like driving for McLaren – you qualify towards the back of the grid, then get moved further back. Not funny, I was told.

We started next to the back row. The weather was very mixed, more wet than dry and at times very wet. Steve had broken his thigh when cycling earlier this year and had been struggling to get fit. He took the start and ran well for the first hour, moving the car up two places before he signalled he was coming in. Rob was kitted and ready as we didn't know if the problem was with the car or driver. It was driver – Steve was shattered, Spa being a very fast and physical circuit. So Rob jumped in, the car was refuelled and out he went.

Rob put in some solid lap times and moved the car up 13 places to 69th before he noticed that above 5500rpm he was blowing out blue smoke. By now it was dusk. Dave Hill and Andy Booth on the pit wall thought Rob had signalled he was coming in, but weren't sure. Rob appeared to go through next lap at speed, so we all relaxed, only to panic when he appeared down the pit lane – we'd seen the wrong MGB go by. Kevin Lillywhite and Adam quickly checked the B's engine and confirmed crank case pressure, but water and oil were OK. The only thing to do was strip the cylinder head off a very hot engine to check if a piston had been holed.

There were no holed pistons, but broken piston rings on number two cylinder. Not another retirement? No, it was quickly decided to rebuild the engine and go for a finish. Having stripped and rebuilt the engine in under 90 minutes, Kev was heard to say he'd never again pay for eight hours labour at Hall's Garage when he had seen what they could do in 90 minutes...!

But we still had two hours to run. Would



The Hall's Garage team: Steve Hall, Rob Croft, Adam Key, Dave Hill, Kevin Lillywhite, Andy Booth and Richard Croft.



the engine last? It was doubtful it would last two hours, but it might last one. It was decided to hold Adam until the last hour. Just as he was released from the pit with instructions not to exceed 5500rpm, the rain increased to torrential and a succession of accidents triggered the safety car, a Mustang and a GT40 nearly collecting Adam as they hit the pit wall. When it is pitch black and raining, Spa can be a scary place to drive. To clear the accident, the safety car convoyed the race through the pit lane. The race continued and we waited with fingers crossed. With ten minutes to go, Adam came into the pit lane – no charge from the



alternator, the belt had gone slack. We re-tensioned the belt and got him out just as the race finished. We had beaten the odds, we were classified 80th, but we had finished.

The story doesn't end there. This year Dave was towing the trailer with his Jeep and the Transit was back up. Coming out of Dover on the M20 on Sunday evening, the Jeep lost all its water. We rang AA recovery, put the trailer on the Transit, and left Dave to his fate. We got home at midnight, Dave didn't get home until 2am.

I've heard mutterings that next year we will return for a class win...

Richard Croft



What a lovely MG Metro!

That is a stunning MG Metro that you have bought, lovely example and a good price too. I bought a standard Metro 15 years ago (or my daughter did) for £150 that she could take to university in Southampton. It only needed new brakes, top front balljoints, rear radius arms, new tyres and an MoT! It had already covered 98,000 miles and the engine sounded a bit slack, but it went like the wind and served her well. But the thrashing up and down the M3 eventually took its toll and the Metro was moved on. It was also

Cinnabar, in fact I still have an unopened litre of cellulose.

One of our Epsom MGOC members traded in his MG Metro under the scrappage scheme for a Chinese TF135. He now wishes that he had kept it, but that's a retired bank manager for you – £2000 for a car worth £500 must be good! This was the MG Metro that caused HRH Prince Philip to exclaim: 'Is that an MG?' when it passed by him at Windsor in 2009 (pictured left).

Bryan Young

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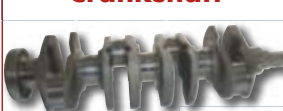
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Graham Robson



Graham's first car was an MG TA, which he used whilst he was a graduate trainee at Jaguar Cars. He started writing about cars in 1961, joined *AUTOCAR* in 1965, became an independent automotive historian in 1972, and has since sampled every type of MG, ancient and modern. He has published more than 160 books, and countless magazine articles.

A warm welcome this issue to Graham Robson, who joins MGE as Don Hayter recovers from illness - Ed

If you haven't already got John Clancy's latest DVD, *The BMC/BL Competitions Department*, then I reckon you should add it to your Christmas list. Yes, OK, I have to admit that there is a bit of Robson in it (I shared the presenting duties with Peter Browning and Bill Price), but there is a lot of MG in the colourful 100 minutes of this disc, and at only £12.95 I know you will enjoy all that.

It was filmed at MG Live earlier this summer and you will have read an event report in the August issue, but to recap briefly, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Works Competitions Department at Abingdon, it was Peter and Bill who got together and organised the superb layout of ex-Works cars. More than 50 in total - not all of them MGs of course, but including every make and model which had been represented since 1955. Whenever possible during the weekend, my job was to break off from commentary duties in the main arena and dash across to this ex-Works display on the Copse Runway to find and interview the personalities who had turned up to join in the fun.

I must say that I was amazed to see some of the Works MGs which had made such an impact when they were new, and even more amazed to note the arrival of a few individual machines that I thought had gone to the great scrapyard in the sky. As you will see from the action footage in this DVD,

almost all the cars arrived under their own power - maybe a few had arrived nearby on trailers and only driven the last few miles under their own steam, but the vast majority looked as if they were still ready to tackle Le Mans, the Targa Florio or Sebring at the press of a button.

Most of all, though, I was delighted to see and talk to Peter Browning and Bill Price, both of whom have MG and Abingdon experience which began in the hey-day of the MGA and MGB, and who still look back with smiles on their faces. (As Bill told me on camera: 'It was a real pleasure to go to work every day...') It was also a delight to meet the surviving mechanics, who never lost their love of the job and being part of a famous team.

Then there were some of the true old stagers like Jack Sears and Harold Brooks, who had been among the drivers in the very early days. Although not every notable could be present - neither Rauno Aaltonen nor Timo Makinen could make it, for instance - it was good to see some cars which spend most of their retirement tucked away in private hands.

Some of those cars were familiar to most of us, but some were not, and it was just possible that some had been re-created from rusty old wrecks many years ago. At this point I am reminded of another occasion when, looking at a well-known ex-Sebring BMC race car of which just three were built, I was told by an ever-so-senior MG one-make club personality: 'Yes, there were just three of these, and I know where all ten of them now live...'

Being asked to present, top and tail this DVD was a real privilege. I have now done this on several occasions for John Clancy, also covering Mini, Triumph and Sunbeam Tiger subjects, but on this occasion there was the thrill of being allowed to sit in some of the cars, to talk about them, to experience the 'Paddy Hopkirk sat here' sensation.

And sometimes, if I am honest, to marvel at the way some of the cars seemed to be so functional and downright uncomfortable for the drivers. Maybe I should own up to being less limber than I once was, but for me, getting into and enjoying the ambience of the 1955 Le Mans MGA prototype was restricted by the lack of creature comforts once there, and by the thought that the drivers were faced with spending hour after hour in these open-top machines. That made the contrast with slipping into the cockpit of the Le Mans MGBs of the early 1960s more inviting - and it was no wonder that the irrepressible Paddy Hopkirk described his Le Mans drives as being 'boringly reliable.'

I was also amazed that two enthusiasts had not only fallen in love with the on-going Abingdon character, but had gone to the trouble of restoring or recreating two of the famous race-car transporters which made the team unique in the 1960s. Simply equipped but beautifully detailed, they provided a delightful contrast to the monumental gin-palaces we now see around the circuits. All in all it was a thoroughly unforgettable weekend.

GR

“On this occasion there was the thrill of being allowed to sit in some of the cars, to talk about them, to experience the ‘Paddy Hopkirk sat here’ sensation”

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Roger Parker



Roger Parker is a former policeman whose technical skill and wide experience of MGs form the backbone of our own Technical Q&A pages.

I bought my 1968 MGB Roadster in August 1973 on a whim as it was sitting on the forecourt of Ideal Garage which used to be situated at the corner of Drews Lane and Bromford Lane in Birmingham. Having time to kill, I went to just have a look but came away having spent £595 and part chopped an uninspiring Ford Corsair.

Some may recognise Drews Lane as the location of the old Wolseley factory, which later became the transmissions factory in Leyland days and more recently was the Freight Rover van plant. Like so many other Birmingham car sites, it has been flattened and is turning into light industrial units and warehousing with the feeder roads being named after the former car brands that once dominated the site.

I never imagined that I would still have the MGB some 42 years later, or that it would turn into what it is today, but looking back at the road I followed is quite interesting, especially the pre-V8 days. Within 12 months of buying the MGB and having been blown into the weeds by a supercharged Marina 1.8TC, the desire to squeeze more horses from the engine was very strong. So I followed the guidance laid down in the original red cover British Leyland Special Tuning manual with twin 1½in SUs and tubular long centre branch exhaust manifold and system.

These did help sharpen the engine, but not by much and so I decided to follow the same route I had with my mother's MG1300 Mk2 a couple of years earlier. I'd fitted this with a stage 2 modified head from my local tuning emporium and it was a case of lighting the blue touch paper and holding on. So an MGB head was prepared by the

same people and expectations were high, but the results were disappointing and I learned that the ostensibly similar A and B-series heads do not give the same results when modified.

In 1977 at 95,000 miles, number three spark plug started to regularly oil up due to failing oil control rings and rather than just rebuild the engine, I decided to follow the popular 1948cc conversion using Lotus Ford Twin Cam pistons at 0.040in oversize. With a standard head this 8% capacity hike increased power by 12%, along with a great slug of extra low down torque. I later reconditioned the modified head for another boost in performance.

Some time later and following an MGOC feature, I had contact from Peter Burgess who soon became a close friend. Neither of us could believe that there wasn't more to be had from carefully created modifications to the MGB cylinder head. Over many years I spent hundreds of hours with Peter, initially in his shed where he'd constructed a flow bench from industrial vacuum cleaners and various other parts. We'd modify heads and measure airflow changes at various valve lifts, then prepare a full head, fit it to an engine and measure the results. This was very effective and drew demand from others, which allowed Peter to start the business for which he is so well known. Peter then purchased a Clayton Rolling Road, allowing even more effective development and many more hours of pleasurable tinkering.

In recent years I haven't been able to spend as much time with Peter as I would have liked, but I have used the same development techniques all of my modern MGs and contrary to

what many think, the same techniques of head modifications can be as productive in most 16 valve twin cam heads as they are on the clearly restricted MGB head. Modern MGs are usually easier to set up as the engine management systems are adaptive, and when you stick with standard cams and don't go too big on the valves or ports, then these systems cope very well. If you do go further, then mapping changes are widely available.

An interesting recent example is our ZS120 tweaked with TF135 parts and a Z&F remap. I've mentioned this before, but running the car on Peter's rolling road now put figures to the seat-of-the-pants feelings. The car developed 143.3 peak bhp, repeated several times to within tenths of a bhp, but the engine did seem a little breathless in the upper rev range. So I tried a trick I have used before to confirm this by unclipping the air filter box lid and turning it upside down so, with the open bonnet, it had unrestricted airflow. The next few runs were all very close at 150.7bhp, so yes there was an air filter restriction, but having nothing better to immediately replace the filter with meant this was as far as I could go that day.

There was time for one interesting diversion, though. Peter had an oil additive called K-Tec that claims to reduce internal engine friction. Adding the K-Tec and running the car on the rollers to allow good circulation before any power run did show smoother running, but several subsequent power runs surprised us both with a consistent additional 2bhp for a final figure of 152.9bhp. This is not going to change the on-road performance, and quite whether the fuel consumption will change is currently unknown. However I must stress this is not a product endorsement, just a note on one limited test that is reported simply as a matter of interest. Other oil additives may well show similar results.

RP

“The same techniques can be as productive in most 16 valve twin cam heads as they are on the clearly restricted MGB heads”

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Barry Sidery-Smith



Barry Sidery-Smith has been racing since 1959. In 1970 he bought the ex-Works MGB DRX 255C and he has been delighting MG racing fans ever since.

These days most classic car races last about 20 or 25 minutes. In fact a quick glance at the programme for this year's Goodwood

Revival shows that of the 16 races held, seven lasted 20 minutes, seven lasted 25 minutes, one lasted 60 minutes and the longest race lasted 90 minutes.

However, the first races used to go on much longer because motorsport started when car manufacturers wanted to prove how reliable their cars were. The most famous of these reliability trails was the Le Mans 24 Hours, which started in 1923 and is still going strong today. Others included the Mille Miglia (1000 miles) in Italy and the Sebring 12 Hours in America.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s there was a steady stream of endurance races in which works and privateer teams raced side by side. This form of racing proved popular with British manufacturers, and factory-prepared works MGBs were often to be found at these events. Without doubt, one of the biggest successes came in 1966 when Andrew Hedges and Julien Vernaeve won The Worlds Longest Motor Race, the 84 hour race at the Nurburgring circuit in Germany. The MGB was well suited to endurance racing because, whilst you would never call it a fast car, it did prove remarkably reliable.

When I was younger, I was asked to race modern touring cars in European endurance races. I drove a Toyota Corolla for a Belgium dealer team, taking part in 24 hour races at Spa, the Nurburgring and the Hockenheimring. I

learnt a lot at those events, because endurance racing requires a different set of skills to sprint races.

Luckily there is still an opportunity for drivers to experience endurance racing in their classic cars. The Spa Six Hours is held each autumn at the Spa Francorchamps circuit in Belgium. My MGB was one of 108 cars taking part at this year's race. I teamed up with experienced MGB racer John Yea and former Jaguar XKR racer Chris Ryan. We were one of 13 MGBs taking part in the race, which is open to FIA specification cars.

This race attracts a wide variety of cars such as Ford GT40s, Mustangs, Jaguar E-types, Cobras and Porsche 911s. However one important thing to remember about endurance racing is that qualifying high up the grid does not necessarily mean a good result – consistency and reliability are the keys to success. Some cars start off well, but are back in the pits with problems before the first hour has passed. And since the Spa Six Hours starts at 4pm, approximately half the race distance is completed in the dark. This means that cars must run with bright headlights, as only the pit straight and a couple of corners have any flood lighting. This in turn puts a lot of stress on a car's electrical system, particularly the alternator. Some teams rig up powerful spotlights on the front of their cars, then wonder why their standard alternator can't cope with charging the battery.

These bright lights also make it very difficult for drivers of the cars ahead, as they are often dazzled in their mirrors

– race cars only run with their lights on full beam, and they don't dip them when they come up behind another car! This also makes it incredibly difficult to judge the closing speed of cars behind you. In daylight you can recognise other cars and you tend to know how long it will take them to catch you and where it is safe to let the faster cars through. At night it is very difficult to tell if the set of headlights behind are on a GT40 or a Mini Cooper.

Another challenge that presents itself to endurance racers is how much fuel to carry and how often to stop to refuel. Don't think that it is the same as you see on the television for F1 or Le Mans. To refuel at the Spa Six Hours you need to drive to the end of the old pit lane, turn right and queue up at the petrol filling station in the paddock. Drivers must get out of the car and refuel it themselves without any outside assistance from their team. If they are unlucky and come in to refuel during a busy period, then they can be stuck in a queue of cars waiting to refuel.

Some of the big engined Cobras need to come in to refuel once an hour, which can put them at a serious disadvantage to smaller, lighter cars. But it is not necessarily an advantage to fit a bigger petrol tank. I have a 110 litre fuel tank in my MGB. Petrol weighs about 1.6lbs per litre, so at the start of the race the full tank holds 180lbs of fuel. This is the equivalent of a medium build 6ft 4in man sat in the boot of the car. You won't be surprised to hear that this makes quite a lot of difference to the way the car handles. For the Spa Six Hours my MGB only makes one pit stop, which we time to coincide with the final driver change over. This saves us a considerable amount of time and helps explain how our MGB was able to make its way up from 85th place at the start, to finish 37th overall.

BS-S

“It is not like Formula One. To refuel at the Spa Six Hours you need to drive to the end of the old pit lane, turn right and queue up at the petrol filling station in the paddock”

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It might look like any other well-used MGB GT, but this car certainly doesn't sound or go like one. Could the diesel-engined oddball be a genuine Abingdon experiment? Words and pictures: Paul Guinness





he instructions issued by the vendor weren't what you'd normally hear when taking a spin in an MGB GT: 'Turn the ignition key part-way and press the glow plug button on the dashboard for about 30 seconds; then turn the key fully whilst holding in the button and she should fire up... eventually.' After what felt like at least a minute of shaking, popping and banging, the engine did indeed burst into life, at which point any further conversation was drowned out by the noise.

You'll have deduced by now that this is no ordinary example of a 1972 MGB GT. It certainly looks ordinary in that it's far from immaculate and has obviously enjoyed an active career. There might be just 62,000 miles showing on the odometer, but this particular GT has been well used; the paintwork is reasonably tidy from a few paces away and the bodywork is solid enough to have warranted an MoT pass this year, but it's plainly a car that has seen life. Things start to get interesting, however, once you hear it running – because that's when you realise there's a diesel engine under that Bronze Yellow bonnet.

The MG's current owners couldn't resist bidding for it when it went under the hammer at a Brightwells classic car sale earlier this year. Although unplanned, they ended up seeing off the competition and placing the highest bid, even if some folk might struggle to understand why.

Brothers Ru and Dave Besley, who both live in the Bristol area, have a long-held passion for classic cars. That's why they trade part-time (mainly in modern classics) and have a good array of affordably priced machinery always available. So what was it about a diesel-engined MGB GT that attracted their interest?

'We had a shortlist of cars we were keen to buy,' explains Ru, 'but ended up with none of them. Then we saw the MG in the catalogue, had a quick look and decided to bid.' Had they heard it running at that stage? 'No, and if we had, we probably wouldn't have bothered bidding!' laughs Dave.

There was, however, enough intrigue surrounding this MG to convince the duo to buy it, primarily for its quirkiness but also for its potential historical significance, more of which later. Rather impressively, Ru chose to drive the MG back from Brightwells' headquarters at Leominster in Herefordshire to the brothers' base just outside Bristol. So how was the journey? 'Interesting,' was the honest reply. >



“ Noise levels were incredible, but I managed to get it up to 65mph and it cruised happily in overdrive ”

'The noise levels were incredible, but I managed to get it up to around 65mph and it cruised happily in overdrive. Being a diesel there's also loads of torque, so gear changes were kept to a minimum. It was only when I got out of the car at the end of the journey that I realised my ears were ringing quite badly.'

OLD-FASHIONED DIESEL

It doesn't take a genius to work out that the diesel engine in question is a period unit, from the days when anything fuelled by Heavy Oil (as the DVLA officially refers to it) was ferociously noisy and famously lethargic. You got torque, reliability and economy, but you also got excessive noise, smells, smoke and various other attributes that were deemed undesirable by private car buyers of the time. That's why diesel engines of the 1960s (and before) were primarily used in commercial vehicles, despite the best efforts of companies like Mercedes and Peugeot to bring derv to the car market as well.

Our very own BMC experimented with diesel cars, of course, via oil-burning versions of the Austin A60 Cambridge and Morris Oxford MkVI. The engine used was a diesel development of the 1489cc B-series, producing a mere 40bhp at 4000rpm in this guise. When fitted to the family Farina models, this meant a top speed of only around 65mph and a 0-60mph time of almost 40 seconds, although BMC did boast that its diesel twosome was capable of *'better than 40mpg at an average speed of 40mph'*. Perhaps inevitably, sales of the diesel-powered Farinas remained pitifully low, restricted almost entirely to the minicab market; both cars were too slow and too unrefined to appeal to large numbers of family car buyers.

The engine was a success in other applications, however, particularly as a popular choice among users of diesel-powered canal boats. As for commercial vehicles, it found itself at home between the seats of the forward-control J4 van, which was offered in both Austin and Morris guises throughout the 1960s and finally replaced by the crucial new Sherpa in 1974. While most buyers opted for petrol-powered J4s, the diesel derivative filled an important niche in the van market of the time.

As the B-series engine was developed over the years, so too

was the diesel version. By the time the Sherpa was ready for launch, the B-series diesel had already grown to 1798cc (primarily for marine use in the pre-Sherpa days), this indirect-injection unit now pushing out a healthier 52bhp at 4250rpm. Interestingly, the 1.8 was never offered in a UK-spec diesel-engined passenger car, British Leyland choosing to focus on petrol-only models for its home market throughout the 1970s.

So where does this leave the MGB GT featured here, a model that (as you've no doubt deduced by now) features a B-series diesel engine under the bonnet? Well, that's a good question. To help find some answers, we managed to make contact with the car's former owner, John Clifford, who has lived in the Malvern area for a number of years. John acquired the MG in December 2011 and ran it for the next 3½ years, during which time he managed to piece together some fascinating snippets of information about its history – and its potential significance.

RUNNING ON DERV

'I found out about the car when a neighbour of mine asked me one day if I was interested in buying a diesel-engined MGB,' recalls John. 'It belonged to a friend of my neighbour's, Brian Cornock, who lives in Wales. I thought it sounded like a bit of fun, so we headed off to take a look.'

The MGB GT was as described, but was virtually a non-runner at the time John agreed to buy it: 'It was a very poor starter, although Brian assured me that the engine had recently been rebuilt – which I took to be true as there was excellent oil pressure. I've not yet come across a diesel engine that's beaten me, so I couldn't resist the challenge. I had to have the car!'

John is a semi-retired farmer, having spent much of his life working a large farm in the Cotswolds. His current set-up is a little smaller but keeps him busy, and over the years he's spent more hours than he cares to remember tinkering with diesel engines. He admits to admiring the simplicity of the older units: 'I remember Nuffield tractors using the BMC B-series diesel, so it's an engine I've always been familiar with. All I had to do with the MG was to make it a decent starter, and hopefully I'd then have a really practical classic on my hands.'

RIGHT: The diesel conversion has been beautifully executed, with fine attention to detail extending to the cutouts for bigger batteries.

Below: From the outside there is little to give the game away – until the engine fires with all the clatter of a truly classic diesel.





As predicted, the engine turned out to be in a good state of health. John improved its starting by swapping the two six-volt batteries for a pair of twelve-volts and fitting high-performance heater plugs. Suddenly, once the button for the glow plugs had been held in for 20 seconds or so, the car would fire into life.

'Because it was so difficult to start before, Brian used to take it for its MoT every year and then not use it for another 12 months,' said John. 'Once I'd sorted the problems though, it became a brilliantly useful car to have around. It was pretty slow of course, but so cheap to run as it would average around 60 to the gallon. I ended up driving over 1000 miles a year in it.'

But what does John know about the history of the diesel-powered GT? 'I'd love to be able to say I've got written proof that it's an ex-factory developmental car, but I haven't,' he admits. 'However, so many clues point to it being exactly that. The MG Car Club has been aware of the car for a very long time, because when I sent my forms off to Kimber House to join the club I received a phone call asking me to confirm the car's VIN and engine number. This I did, and was then told that the MGCC had previously known about the car, but had lost all trace of it for 25 years.'

John's new MG was soon attracting the attention of fellow enthusiasts. 'The Arden MG Club heard about the car and asked me to take it along to their next meeting, where members seemed fascinated by it,' he says. So enamoured was he with his diesel-powered one-off, John joined the Gloucester branch of the MGOC and began going along to various events. 'You need a sense of humour to turn up in a diesel-powered MGB,'

he says, 'so we had some laughs. The other members used to joke when I arrived, saying: "Here comes John on his tractor!"'

ABINGDON CREATION?

It was at an MG event at Castle Combe that John had an interesting encounter, and one that convinced him about his car's authenticity. 'A chap walked over to me and my car and, without any prompting, asked: "Has it still got its diesel engine?" I looked at him in amazement, especially when he then told me that he'd put the engine in it when it was new.'

The stranger (who John thinks may have been a Mr Walker but can't be certain, saying: 'My memory's not what it was!') explained that he'd worked at the MG plant at Abingdon. 'He told me he was part of a team of five carrying out MG developmental work at the time. He insisted that the car was genuine and had been fitted from new with a 1.8 diesel engine, but that very few people at Abingdon – including most of the management – were aware of its existence.'

In the end, according to John's ex-Abingdon contact, the project was deemed to be a failure, the end result having too little power for a sports car. As with any other developmental car, the GT would normally have then been dismantled or crushed, but for some reason it allegedly ended up being sold to a line manager at the factory. The diesel-powered and (supposedly) Abingdon-built MGB GT was suddenly released into the wild, and would survive through to the 21st century.

So just how true could this be – and what chances are there of obtaining proof all these years later? John tried to find out more

via the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust, who could find no evidence of the car being built from new as a diesel. The MG's current owners, meanwhile, have tried to find out more from the DVLA, as Ru Besley told us: 'I called the DVLA, who confirmed that they had records of the car's history. I got the impression it was all of the previous documents, so I sent off the fee that DVLA charges for providing copies. I then got a letter back, returning the fee and explaining that copies of records couldn't be provided for this car after all. It all seemed very odd. Why would DVLA refuse to supply information if it has it, when this is one of the services it offers?'

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

At present, the mystery surrounding this diesel-powered BGT is as great as it ever was. The car has been through a total of eight owners to date – but with no way of finding out their details via Swansea, the car's current keepers have no leads to follow. What they do have, however, is a genuinely fascinating car with a certain appeal of its own. All of which led to one final question before I left Bristol: 'Any chance of a drive?'

The experience was to be rather short-lived. Starting the car was taking time, and keeping it running wasn't easy. 'I suspect there's a problem with one of the injectors, which we'll have to take a look at,' Ru told me. He could well be right, but at least I got to spend some time behind the wheel, experiencing for the first time the familiar surroundings of an MGB GT combined with the unmistakable (and completely unfamiliar) sound of a throbbing old diesel under the bonnet.

I can't help finding this whole story rather intriguing, and the car itself almost appealing. An MGB GT capable of 60-plus miles to the gallon makes sense on paper, even if its lethargic performance might prove frustrating in reality. As for the claim



Above: Rupert and Dave Besley had no plan to bid for this car when they went to the auction, but were seduced by its novelty.

that this is a genuine ex-factory developmental car, well, who knows? The story of the chance encounter with an ex-Abingdon engineer certainly sounds authentic; and with this particular car being built at a time of great uncertainty regarding oil supplies and petrol prices, it makes sense that Abingdon's engineers (who famously worked on projects that British Leyland sometimes knew little or nothing about) might have seen the need for a more economical addition to the MG line-up.

In the end, of course, the idea of a diesel-engined MGB never reached production, although numerous cars have since been fitted with relatively modern oil-burning engines. As for the BGT here, all we can do is hope that somebody reading this might come forward with more information about its history. If you can help to fill in the gaps, we'd love to hear from you. 📧



FANCY OWNING IT?

If you like the idea of taking on this fascinating MGB GT, fitted with a period diesel engine and offering plenty of intrigue regarding its history, give Ru Besley a call on **07966 398476**. The MG is MoT'd until March 2016 and can be viewed in the Bristol area. Ru is open to sensible offers from genuine enthusiasts who intend keeping the car complete and original.

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Rallying a ZA Magnette



We talk to José de Sousa, an endurance rally enthusiast who thinks nothing of entering challenging events in a variety of classic cars such as MG's ZA Magnette, adventures that included the Peking-to-Paris Rally. **Report by Mike Taylor**

The appeal of driving continuously at breakneck speed for weeks at a time along dangerous unmade roads is clearly deeply ingrained in the psyche of globe trotting rally fanatic José de Sousa. Businessman and academic José and his wife Maria (who accompanies him on his gruelling exploits) have amassed an enviable list of punishing events to their credit, creating a huge catalogue of exciting and memorable adventures while taking part in tough endurance rallies and runs around the world.

Born in 1946 in Coimbra, the oldest university town in Portugal founded in 1290, José completed an engineering degree at Lisbon University before taking up a post as lecturer when he graduated. 'My interest in cars started very early in life,' he says enthusiastically. 'After I passed my driving test, my first car was a Citroën Dyane. Soon afterwards, I became attracted to rallying. It was all about the unusual and unexpected incident around the next bend. To me it was far more exciting than continually going around and around a race track.'

'By the age of 23 I was navigating on local rallies, and I spent a year co-driving in the Portuguese National Championship. The events took place roughly every two weeks and I became almost a professional, even though I was still a full-time lecturer.'

At the end of 1971, José won a scholarship and came to the UK to take a PhD at Imperial College, London, bringing his Citroën. 'That lasted until 1975, and the work was so intense there was no time to do any rallying,' he smiles. 'At the time my wife had a Mini, but then we swapped and I had the Mini in London.'

From then on José's career was totally demanding, precluding him from taking part in any kind of motorsport. Then his commercial schedule shifted down a gear, he bought a 1960 Chevrolet Corvette and, as time permitted, began to participate once again. 'We began with some regularity runs and tours, but nothing too demanding,' grins José at the memory of those first outings. 'Next, we bought a 1951 Aston Martin DB2 and took part in the Mil Millas

Argentina in 1999, and the Mille Miglia Storica Italia the following year. Without doubt, it was the longer events that became a target for me, and I bought a 1968 Volvo 142S which had been prepared for rally driver Tony Fall, who was quite well known in Portugal. I had this image of the Volvo being a strong sturdy car and ideal for the events I was interested in. By the time I saw it advertised for sale in 2002, it was owned and driven by a lady.'

The next two years were spent rebuilding the Volvo from its scruffy rally-worn state into a vehicle capable of taking on the rigours of one of the most demanding cross continent events ever, the London-Sydney Marathon. 'I'm no mechanical engineer,' admits José, 'and I entrusted the work to a Volvo specialist local to me in Portugal. He stripped the car completely. It was put on a jig because of its hard life, and the body was found to be out of alignment. That had to be straightened before the car could be re-built for rallying again.'

In 2003 John Brown organised another punishing London-Sydney rally. Says José reflectively: 'It was to be a very long and demanding event routed overland as much as possible and taking three months to reach Sydney. But, not many people could afford to take the necessary time off work, so initially the rally was deferred, and then finally cancelled.'

The following year, Trans World Events run by Nick Brittan put together another London-Sydney event, so José and Maria applied for that. Involving 55 cars the route was to take them from England to Ankara in Turkey. Then, cars and crews were to be air-lifted to India to complete ten days of driving around Mumbai, before being air lifted again to Australia.

'The route covered 12,000km and there was no mechanical back-up,' says José. 'We made a lot of friends and shared in a lot of adventures on that rally. Then, in 2006 we entered the Carrera SudAmericana, again in the Volvo.'

Next came the decision to try the Peking-Paris Challenge Marathon which was to be held in 2007. The inspiration for this event was a race that resulted from a proposal published in the Paris newspaper *Le Matin* on 31 January 1907 which read: 'What needs to be proved today is that as long as a man has a car, he can do

anything and go anywhere. Is there anyone who will undertake to travel this summer from Peking to Paris by automobile?

The Peking-Paris motor race was first held that year covering a total distance of 9317 miles from China (now Beijing) to Paris. Of the 40 race entrants, only five teams with their cars were shipped to Peking. Despite the race committee cancelling the event, it still went ahead, starting from the French embassy in Peking on 10 June 1907. The winner was Prince Scipione Borghese, who arrived in Paris on 10 August that year.

'For the 2007 event, the eligible car production cut-off date to enter was 1960 and my Volvo was registered in 1968,' explains José. 'I tried to convince organiser Phillip Young that it was basically the same car as the earlier Volvo Amazon, just with a different bodyshe'll, but sadly, he wouldn't agree and so I bought a Volvo 544. Then, a few months later Phillip changed his mind and sent me an email saying that they would not accept any Volvo and offering to give me my money back. I was furious. It was at this point that I considered buying another car.'

José decided that his next car had to be a four-door saloon, explaining: 'My Volvo 142S is a two-door vehicle and locating a particular tool or spare en route invariably means moving a huge number of boxes and lifting things out of the car. My brother worked for Nissan and the Bluebird 1600 SSS saloon was a well-known rally car, so that was one option. Then I began considering a British car. One potential option was a Rover P4 – they're not very fast, but they are reliable. Next, I thought about a Sunbeam Rapier. However, though it had a well-established reputation as being a successful rally car in the 1950s, like the Volvo, the Rapier only has the two doors.'

José finally decided upon an MG ZA/ZB-type Magnette. 'Appearance did not play any part in my notion to buy it, although I did like the look of the car, especially from the rear,' he asserts candidly. 'The over-riding factor was the challenge in trying to make the Magnette into a car capable of undertaking the huge stresses of a long distance rally like the Peking-Paris. I had no particular preference for either a ZA or a ZB, though the steering column is split for safety on





the later car. But we were going to strip it down and build it up from a bare shell anyway.'

Having made his choice, in 2005 José began trawling eBay until he came across a 1956 ZA in apparently good condition for sale in the UK. 'The owner sent me some photographs and I bought it unseen,' he acknowledges. 'When I eventually saw the car, I was surprised at the thickness of the metal. Better still, there wasn't a trace of rust. When I eventually got to drive it, I wasn't concerned about how it felt because I knew that it would behave very differently once we'd completed the preparation.'

With the MG in the workshops in Portugal, work began quickly. 'Our target date was 10 June 2007, which was the start date for the Peking-Paris of that year,' says José. 'From the outset one of my major concerns was that the original engine was only 1498cc, which produced a modest 60bhp and 76lb/ft of torque, not very much for attempting the long, fast stretches on the rally, especially in Mongolia where daily distances can easily amount to 400km.' For this reason José decided to remove the ZA engine and install an MGB engine complete with overdrive gearbox instead. He's now on his third!

Changes to the suspension and braking included replacing the original Magnette front drums with disc brakes from the MGA, while the differential was changed from 4.87:1 to a taller 4.55:1 ratio. It was planned to use 15in wheels to give as much ground clearance as possible for dealing with the rough terrain, the ride height being increased by some three inches.

While the drivetrain was on the bench, work began on the bodyshell. 'We took it back to bare metal and put in an additional 650 spot welds to strengthen the shell,' relates José. 'There was also a lot of cutting and modifying done to the transmission tunnel to take the gearbox with the overdrive unit. In addition to giving the body torsional rigidity, uppermost in our minds was taking every opportunity to save weight. Had I found someone with a glassfibre bonnet, I would have bought it.'

Fundamental to the rebuild was José's decision to change the car to lefthand drive. 'We were going to be driving across Siberia,' he explains, 'and attempting to overtake large Russian lorries in a righthand drive car with Maria saying 'go' or 'don't go' would have been too dangerous to contemplate. Luckily, I found an MG Magnette wreck locally and removed

the steering box. In contrast, relocating the dashboard was quite straightforward because it is assembled from individual panels, and these could just be moved to the lefthand side. Changing the position of the pedals was simply a matter of drilling the bodyshell to take the pedal boxes in their new location.'

José acknowledges that during these early days several fundamental mistakes were made in the car's assembly. 'We were unable to find a suitable through-flow exhaust manifold that nestled neatly between the steering column and the engine,' he says. 'The only alternative was to fabricate an exhaust system ourselves that routed forward and then beneath the front axle. Not surprisingly, that proved a major problem because of the restricted ground clearance. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that the sump guard was insufficiently strong to take the continuous battering from boulders and severe outcrops on roads. From the outset they both created problems for us.'

Another shortcoming was the decision not to strengthen the front suspension. 'The weakness was in the top locating points on the inner wing panels, which weren't designed to take the rigours of high-speed driving over huge





to a stop. Despite the barren location, it was quickly recovered and towed at high speed to a Mongolian garage. A swift appraisal revealed that as well as a dead engine, the Magnette had a chipped windscreen, a broken headlight and driving lights, a damaged shock absorber and a punctured radiator. Remarkably, by the following morning the garage had the engine running again, but unprepared to risk a journey during the night with no headlamps, José hired a truck that ferried them the 200 miles to the Russian border where more effective repairs could be completed.

The drive across Russia proved tiring if uneventful, José and Maria safely reaching the Baltic states and then finally working their way down into France. They finished the event after 35 days of driving, the Magnette being among the 100 finishers out of a total of 130 cars that had lined up in Beijing. Better yet, they had the added satisfaction from being part of the three-car group that won the Classics Team Prize.

Plans were then made to utilise the Magnette for the Classic Safari the following year, but in the event the Volvo was pressed back into service and the MG was not used again until 2009 when it was entered in the Casablanca Challenge arranged by the Endurance Rally Association based in Wantage, Oxfordshire. Flagged as likely to be an unforgettable experience as a result of newly found roads on the edge of the Atlas Mountains, it included stunning scenery and three hillclimbs circuits. The MG was duly prepared and José and Maria took full advantage on the event. 'In the space of two or three days I cracked three steel wheel rims,' recalls José with a smile. 'They all went at the same time.'

The next Peking-Paris was held in 2010. Critical among the lessons learnt three years before was the need to completely redesign the MG's suspension. 'We fitted Swedish Ohlin coil-over shock absorbers all round and redesigned the front suspension with solid upper mounting points and modified arms,' says José, 'which had the added advantage of increasing the all-important ground clearance.' He and his team also made changes to the exhaust, remaking the system so that it routed above the front crossmember, so putting it out of the way of unforgiving boulders and damaging road surfaces. Finally, in an effort to increase power and make tuning the engine easier at high

potholes. The metal sheared almost daily and required plates welded in temporarily to secure the suspension studs.'

Other modifications to the car included changing to a rubber fuel tank with a filler cap mounted on the C-pillar, a full rollover bar, rally-style seats, re-routing the fuel and brake pipes inside the car and installing an anti-fire foam system. 'All the body preparation was the work of one person,' says José. 'When that was completed, I arranged for a rally specialist to take on the task of preparing the car and a third person to undertake the re-wiring necessary to power additional components such as auxiliary driving lights and so on.'

With the considerable amount of work on the MG finally finished, how did the car behave? 'When I drove it for the first time I was quite pleased,' says José. 'It felt solid, braked in a straight line and certainly seemed tough enough to make a good basis for attempting the event.'

However, with the rally under way progress through China and Mongolia soon revealed the true terror of driving fast over unimaginably poor road surfaces. Eventually the relentless day-on-day torture took its toll and the Magnette finally succumbed, the engine coming





José and Maria have driven a large variety of cars over the years on an equally large variety of events. The NSU Prinz (below) was one of the first to fire José's passion for rallying, but the couple have also campaigned a Corvette (top).



altitudes and when using poor quality fuel, the twin SU carburetors were replaced by a single Weber type. In fact, for their second Peking-Paris experience, close examination of the regulations revealed that José and Maria could have used the Volvo. 'The cut-off date had moved from 1960 to 1970,' he explains. 'But with all the changes we'd made to the Magnette, the challenge now was to see if they had solved the problems we'd encountered in 2007, so I said we'd take the MG.'

On 10 September, 2010 some 98 cars – including José and Maria in the Magnette – lined up in Beijing to begin their drive of hardship. It was to take in some 11 countries, perhaps the most hazardous being Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Iran where crews often went

days without seeing a soul. After 10,000 miles and 37 days, the 2010 Peking-to-Paris ended on Saturday 16 October with a triumphant celebration through the French capital to mark the end of this extraordinary tour.

'We were very elated,' says José with enthusiasm. 'The changes we'd made to the front suspension worked very well and lasted the distance. However, with the exception of changing the dampers, the rear suspension was left untouched and it was clear that both the upper and lower damper locating points could not take the continuous punishment. On a scheduled day off in Ulaanbaatar, the top mounting points needed extensive welding. However, this placed additional strain on the lower damper attachments, which are only basic metal plates affixed to the spring supports, and they sheared almost daily. Even so, we still finished third in the Pre-1957 Classics category.'

'Today, I am in the lucky position that I can take a lot of time off. Even so, with world-wide Wi-Fi you are never really out of contact. One of the best combinations of competitive rallying and time off for touring is the Endurance Rally Association's Classic Safari Challenge in Southern Africa. The first one we entered was in 2008, starting in Cape Town. We headed north through Namibia to the Angola border, then east through the Caprivi strip into Zimbabwe and Botswana, and finally back to Cape Town through Swaziland and Lesotho. It was a very

special event involving only 25 cars, and arranged so that crews could take days off and go on safari into the outback. From a rally point of view, Africa is one of the few places where you can drive flat out for long distances. We did it again in 2011 and 2014, but with different routes, one of them starting in Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania and going south to Cape Town through Malawi and Mozambique.'

Asked how he views the Peking-to-Paris today, José declares: 'It is a life changing event, even on a daily basis. Having said that, it's only the people who matter, you go more than the extra mile to help each other on an event like that. It is not cheap, though. Today it costs around £50,000 to enter. Then there are fuel bills, shipping and flight costs. Additionally, you can easily spend that amount on preparing the car. And, when it's finished, the car is a complete wreck and you have to rebuild it again!'

I then ask José what's next for him and Maria. 'There are plenty of things left to do, but I have to do them quickly,' he chuckles. 'There are a number of very sad stories of friends, people who have worked all their lives and approached retirement age, only for the worst to happen. These days I get as much pleasure from noncompetitive events as I do from taking part in hard rallies. In July 2015 we covered 3500 miles on a private tour organised by some friends which started in Gothenburg in Sweden, went up to the North Cape and finished in Bergen in Norway, staying in small boutique hotels along the way. Later this year we're entering the Sahara Challenge in Morocco and going to Bhutan in November. As for 2016, we are already planning the season, which includes rallying in New Zealand.'

Finally I ask José what plans he has for the Magnette, to which he replies: 'We recently collected the car from MRacing here in Portugal who designed and built a new suspension and installed new steady-state instruments, plus an overdrive-on indicator, and Brantz partial and total distance and instant speed readout units. It will then be shipped to Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) in readiness to take part in the Thunder Dragon Rally this November. This event lasts three weeks and will take us from India north to Bhutan, and then back into India again. A tour rather than a competitive event, there are a lot of altitude changes, up to 12,000ft and then on the same day down to almost sea level. I'm looking forward to it.'



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Mike (with TD) & Paul (with MGA) outside our Ipswich premises

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PART TWO

An interview with **Mike Dale**

Mike Dale worked at the Donald Healey Motor Company for two years at the start of his career, before moving into sales at BMC where he was extremely successful. He rose to become British Leyland Vice-President of Sales & Marketing in the USA from 1973 having worked his way up through the company, and later President of Jaguar in North America. Last issue we heard what Mike had to say about those early years; this time we start with the 1980s and the demise of MG.

Interview: John Clancy





I first asked Mike about the period during 1979 when he knew the MG factory was going to be closed and whether there was much emotion during that time. Mike took a deep breath and a long pause – clearly there was a lot of emotion and it has stayed with him until now. After a few seconds he answered.

Paul Brand won the E Production National Championship in his MGB that October, and it was a sort of fitting conclusion. But the sadness of that whole period... We were told that they couldn't go on with the MGB because the derivative engines, some of the suspension bits and all sorts of parts on the MGB came from other vehicles in the British Leyland range which were being cancelled or had already been cancelled. There was also the pound/dollar relationship of course [*The value of sterling was soaring against the dollar at this time – Ed*]. You put all those things together and that killed MG.

During the years a lot of us over here had become great friends with John Thornley, Syd Enever and others at Abingdon. Abingdon was a real MG town and there was great camaraderie. For example, one time there was a strike and they had a couple of hundred cars outside over a weekend with no tonneau covers protecting them when it started to rain. The scene would have made a wonderful bit of movie film because everybody in the company who was nearby was running around buying tape, vinyl and plastic and rushing back to the factory to cover the cars to stop any of the upholstery spoiling.

When the factory was about to be closed, the only people in the US who had any advance notice were Graham Whitehead (President of British Leyland Motors Inc. of America) and myself. I don't know if it was a record year, but we were celebrating a great sales year and MG was celebrating 50 years

“It was so overwhelming to see the number of workers who volunteered to take dealers home with them”

in Abingdon. We'd arranged to take the whole dealer body and their wives to Abingdon as a reward for reaching their sales targets, and as part of that there was going to be a big dance which all the people in the factory and all the dealers and their wives would attend. The whole association had become so close and this weekend was going to be the culmination.

On the big night we'd come from somewhere else with the dealers and we had nowhere for them to wash and get dressed for the evening. John Thornley solved the problem by appealing to the workers to see if any of them would take a couple of dealers home with them when they arrived back on the tour buses. It was so overwhelming to see the number of workers who volunteered and the resulting chain of cars at Abingdon waiting to greet the dealers. We actually had so many cars that we ran out of dealers to go home with the workers so had some disgruntled MG employees as a result – some of them had painted their houses, cleaned them and fixed things up to make them as smart as possible just for the occasion.

Another thing we had at this weekend was what I think was then the second largest hot air balloon in the world. I've

ABOVE: Paul Brand had just driven his MGB to national victory in America when the closure of Abingdon was announced. (Photo: Paul Brand)

OPPOSITE PAGE: Mike Dale talked to John Clancy at his home in Culpeper, Virginia.



forgotten how big it was, but 200ft rings a bell. We had an MGB hung underneath it with which we'd done a TV advert. It had a great big octagon on the balloon and we shipped it to England so we could give people tethered rides. The FAA said it was an experimental aircraft and made us fit an altimeter, so it's probably the only MGB in existence that was fitted with an altimeter. We were giving rides and there was a great parade of old MG cars at the same time. You can probably imagine the impact of all this because England does these things wonderfully well. But all through this, Graham and I knew that on the Monday night it was going to be announced that Abingdon was closing.

I then asked Mike to tell us what happened on that Monday night, and about the aftermath.

I think we were in the Guildhall for that meeting. David Andrews made the announcement that the factory was going to close, but I had been told beforehand because I was to be the rabble-rouser and had to get up after David and try to turn the mood to the whole Triumph situation and what we were going to do there. Thornley has never forgiven me for this, but I didn't know he was organizing all the dealers to march on the House of Commons the following day. I got the dealers so excited about Triumph, the TR7 and all the possibilities for the future that they told Thornley they were not going to march. It was one of my better speeches, but on the other hand I sometimes wonder if it was really well aimed.

In reality, it wouldn't have made any difference anyway because MG was beyond help. From the records, we knew the factory could make 20,000 MGBs a year and were capable of getting there. They generally made 17,000 or 18,000 or something of that sort. We kept pushing them to reach 21,000 or 22,000, but that would have required a complete rearrangement of the factory and a rearrangement of the suppliers, which just wasn't going to happen.

Tony Ball and Percy Plant *[both of them were British Leyland executives – Ed]* flew over to the US on the Concorde one day to attend a dealer council meeting on a Saturday morning and then go back again the same day. Of course, we were broke so people flew by Concorde! The basis of the thing

ABOVE: Porsche 928-style pop-up headlights were part of one MG makeover proposal for the TR7. (Photo: David Knowles)

LEFT: The MG factory for sale. (Photo: Bill Price)

BOTTOM LEFT: MGB GT LEs parked outside the Special Tuning Dept. This shot is a frame grab from a reel of Super 8 shot after the RAC Rally in 1980 – the factory had already closed, but the cars were held over until 1981 and here they are awaiting overseas shipment. (Photo: Bill Price)

LEFT (INSET): Mike in the TR7 he persuaded Ken Slagle to drive after he'd won the 1975 National Championship in a Spitfire. (Photo: Ken Slagle)

RIGHT: Mike in his Percival Provost that he rebuilt - he learned to fly in a Provost in the RAF. (Photo: Mike Cook)

BELOW: This is another attempt to turn the TR7 into an MG, the tiny chrome grille looking faintly ridiculous in its wedge-shaped home. (Photo: David Knowles)

was that they wanted to persuade the dealer council that if they put an MG badge on the TR7, it would then rescue all the MG dealers. From my retail experience I knew this was absolute nonsense and it just wouldn't work. All it would be was a face saving exercise so that people politically could say: 'Well, it was somebody else's fault.'

The dealer council met, and we met with them. I had already told the council that from my point of view, if they agreed with it and expected me to go on being the Sales & Marketing Vice President, they'd be disappointed because I would not be there. I told them that I sold cars like that on Piccadilly when the MG Magnette was turned over to the A55 or whatever it was, and it just wasn't feasible. I had a great connection with the dealer council and they weren't fools, they could see that it wasn't going to work. Tony Ball and company worked really hard on us to a point where it became difficult. One of the things I always hold against those two people was that they'd made it clear that even if the company went under, Graham and I would be looked after. Talk about a lack of leadership!

The TR7 did undergo minor makeovers in the USA in the hands of Bruce McWilliams. He had carried out very successful work with this model previously to create special editions and other slightly enhanced models to ensure the company could meet its sales targets during slow periods. Now he was tasked with an attempt to brand it as an MG, but with the limited resources available it was not possible for major modifications. Rover SD1 light clusters at the back were about as ambitious as the project could get, but this rather spoiled the appearance from the rear. The front



“I told them I'd sold cars like that on Piccadilly when the MG Magnette was turned over to the A55 or whatever it was, and it just wasn't feasible.”



BELOW: Paul Brand's MGB had been campaigned by Group 44 Inc from 1970-76, was crashed quite badly by Brian Fuerstenau in the 1976 run-offs and rebuilt just before Paul bought it in 1977. (Photo: Paul Brand)

end attempt was even less successful, with pop-up lights emulating those of the Porsche 928. Having mentioned the Rover SD1, I then put it to Mike that this was another model which did not succeed across the Atlantic.

There was a gas crisis here at the time; we were looking at the V8 Rover SD1 which was about to be introduced and I can remember trying to talk Tony Ball out of it. I told him that launching a V8 into that market was nuts! When he was getting in his car ready to go back to the airport, I remember saying very loudly: 'I know what the Light Brigade felt like now!' He said: 'What do you mean?' I replied: 'You've heard of the Valley of Death? Well that's where the V8 is going!' And of course the press, particularly the chap from the *Financial Times*, also said it was nuts. I remember the reply I gave him, which was the best I could come up with. I said: 'It's a small V8, we're setting a new trend and this is why you're a journalist and I'm a salesman.' He let it go at that point which was very nice of him, but of course we blew it.

All that work in the 1970s though, and the dealer body was left with just Jaguar for the 1980s. Even so, they really turned the company around because they were capable of selling whatever Jaguar would send us. So the work in the 1970s was not wasted because we had learned, for instance, that if you really got the dealer body size down to a level where the individual dealer had enough cars to make a lot of money out

of your franchise, then you got the best salesmen, the best service people, the best parts people, the best dealers and so on. And so nothing in the 1970s was wasted in the 1980s.

The trials and tribulations leading up to the demise of both MG and Triumph were to serve the remaining staff well. All that was left in the USA was Jaguar, but the harsh experiences endured by the company led to them reducing the number of dealers as Mike has explained. This resulted in major improvements to after sales service which, combined with ongoing improvements to build quality (particularly after the Ford takeover), meant the Jaguar name started turning around. It survives to this day and is now one of the most respected car marques in the world, with a great heritage and an enthusiastic and loyal customer base. Whilst a large part of the credit for that is due to the efforts of Mike and his team, some credit must also go to the lessons learned during those days of crisis at British Leyland, and in particular the events leading up to the closure of the Abingdon factory.

Mike now lives in Culpeper, Virginia with Mary, his wife of over 50 years. He keeps himself busy and is currently building a Nieuport 28 aeroplane.

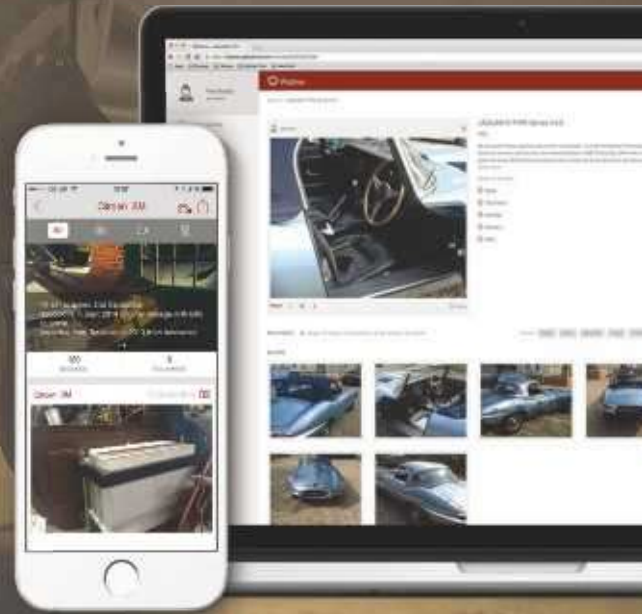
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64 years with an MG VA

Geoffrey Wilson has owned his 1937 VA since 1951. In the intervening 64 years the world has changed considerably, but Geoffrey's goal has been to keep his MG in factory-fresh condition. Still driving at the age of 91, he tells us about his life with this magnificent MG.





As a teenage schoolboy at Leeds Grammar School, I was fascinated with the RAF and joined the Volunteer Reserve. There was a chap in the VR who was a couple of years older than me, and he had an MG VA. That was the first time I saw the car, and though I can't say I was instantly head over heels in love with it, I did think it was very nice. Because the owner was older than me, he got called up in 1939, and he was killed flying Spitfires in 1941. I got my Higher School Certificate results in July 1941, and was in the RAF by 4 September. I trained as a pilot, and ended up as a navigator in Lancasters.

Incidentally, this is a little off topic but I went with the MGCC to an open day at RAF Leeming only a few years ago, and the brother of one of the MG chaps was a serving officer there. He told the CO that I used to fly Lancasters during the war, and a group of officers with scrambled egg on their hats came up and asked if I thought I could still climb aboard. The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight had landed, and they took me to meet the Lancaster's crew. I struggled to get across the main spar that I used to leap over back in the day, but it was very nostalgic. I remember looking round and being asked by one of the flight officers if I noticed anything different. Quite a few things were different, for example it had been fitted with dual controls, however I also noticed that they still had the Elsan chemical toilet by the door. When I pointed this out, the officer said: 'Yes, but we don't use it. We keep our soft drinks in it!'

Back to the MG story and after the war, I had a Vincent HRD motorcycle, a very powerful bike that was my pride and joy. But when I got married in 1951, I had problems with my new in-laws who didn't like my wife riding on the back. She didn't mind, except on the occasion when, at very slow speed coming round a corner on some gravel, I slid sideways and we came off. What really upset my wife was that she thought I examined the motorbike to see if it was damaged without bothering about her! The actual truth was that I'd looked at her first and saw she was perfectly OK, and then examined the bike...

Anyway, we were out one Saturday on the motorbike going for a ride, and just happened to end up near to where this chap with the VA had lived. So we stopped, knocked on the door and I introduced myself to the lady who opened it saying: 'You don't know me, but I was in the RAF VR with your husband...'

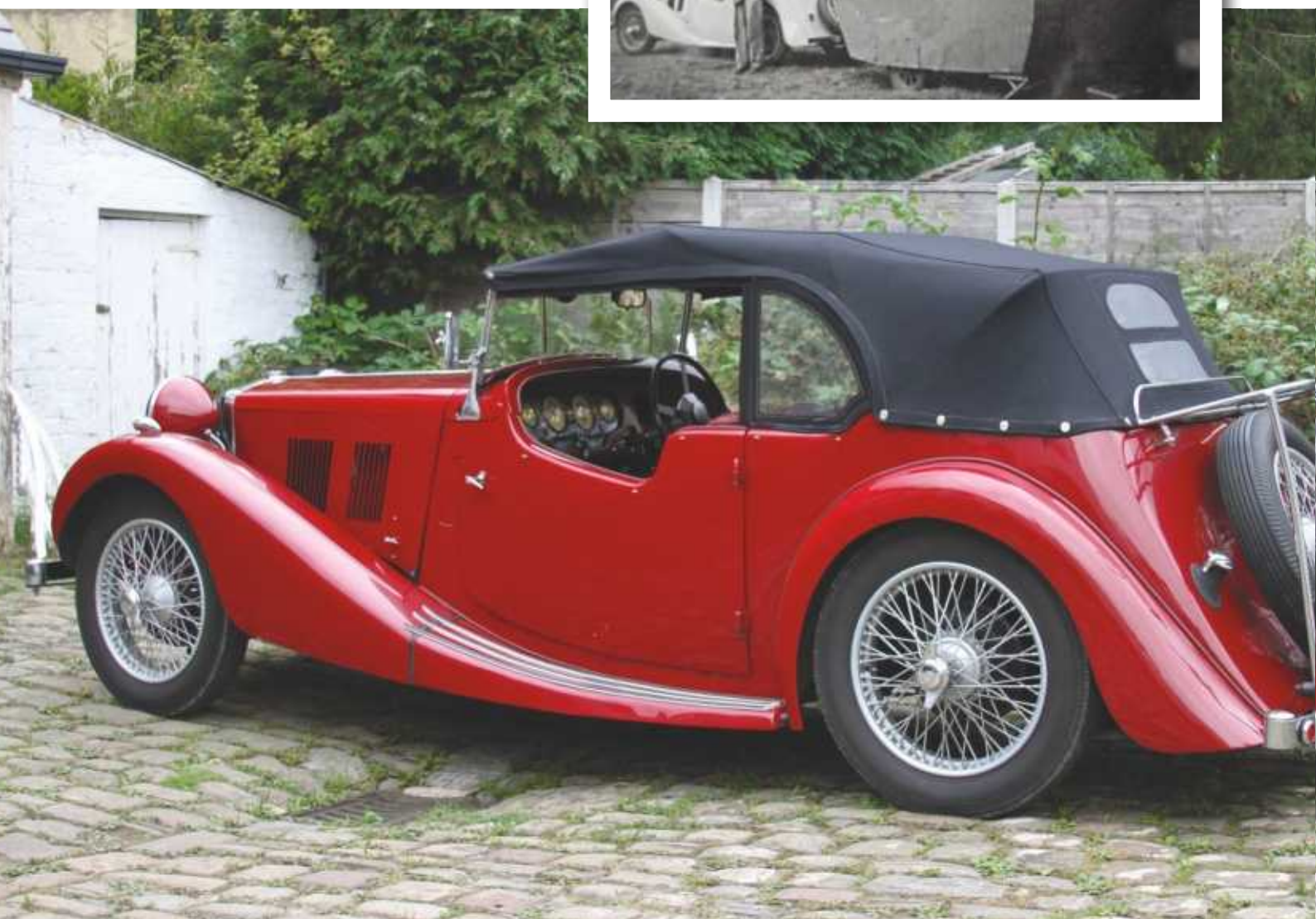
The upshot of all this was that we discovered his VA was still in the garage. There were one or two rust patches on the bonnet, and lots of cobwebs everywhere. It had been put on blocks, but the battery hadn't been taken out and this had split, leaking acid onto the chassis below and causing this to corrode. We ended up buying the MG for £500. People thought I was

mad, but in 1951 it was very difficult to purchase a car, new or old. Besides, I could see a good car under the dust and cobwebs. My wife Winifred found it a little harder to visualise!

£500 was a lot of money back then of course, but don't forget that when it was new, my VA would have represented three years wages for a working man. In 1937 the cheapest car you could buy was a Ford Eight with a tank full of petrol for £99.19s.11d. That was still a year's wages for a working man on £2 per week, and you were reasonably well off if you were earning £2 per week. Nowadays cars are cheaper than they have ever been because you can get a new car for as little as three month's working wage for many people. I can't remember how much I was getting paid in 1951, but the £500 was certainly an awful lot more than three months wages.

Before we could retrieve our new purchase, a friend drove me over for a few weekends, taking tools and a new battery to try and get it running. People don't believe this, but when we eventually got it started, the VA was running on the 1939 petrol that had been left in the tank. What they don't understand is that pre-war petrol didn't have all the additives that modern fuel contains, and it didn't go off so quickly. If you put some in a saucer and left it in the sun, the fuel would evaporate and leave the saucer clear. If you did that with modern petrol, it would leave a sticky red deposit. We managed to run the car with that pre-war petrol back to Leeds where I lived, and that is how my time with the VA started.

From 1951 to 1966 it was our daily car. We used to do a lot of motoring. It was much more pleasant then as there weren't nearly so many cars on the road. I remember for instance riding my motorbike from Leeds to Durham around 1946, and while I overtook a few vehicles, not a single one passed me going the



other way. Simply going for a drive at the weekend used to be a pleasurable experience, out into the countryside and exploring the area, stopping whenever you wanted to stop.

And not just in the countryside. When I was first married and driving the MG, you could stop on the main road in the centre of Leeds outside the big stores. My wife used to buy her shoes from a posh shop called Marshall & Snelgrove in Bond Street in Leeds. I would drive right up to the shop, and the commissionaire would open the passenger door for my wife to get out. I'd then sit in the car until she came back with a new pair of shoes – try doing that now.

We also used to go regularly up to Perth in Scotland to see my aunt, and that trip took us a good ten hours, stopping only for the loo and fuel. That was with the family of course, so we had three children in the back. The VA only has a 1.5 engine and it is a very heavy car. The flywheel is very heavy too which isn't great for acceleration, but is an advantage as a tourer because once it is spinning, that weight keeps the valve gear running and you can go up hills easily enough. It was a slow old journey, though. We even had a very ancient caravan at one point and towed that around Scotland.

I also remember driving Winifred down to London in the early 1950s. Before the motorways, that journey would take us about nine hours travelling down the A1 and through all the various towns. Once in London, we would park outside the Drury Lane Theatre, buy tickets at the box office and see a show. When we came back out, the car would still be there, complete and with our luggage and coats inside. The doors didn't lock, but nothing was ever pinched.

Society changed though, and after we'd had two or three lots of shopping pinched from the VA, we decided we had to get a



Above right: The VA was very well-equipped, but with a modest 1.5-litre engine, it was a tourer not a sports car.

Below: Geoffrey has been an RAC member all his motoring life. He has also amassed plenty of tour plaques.



car with locking doors. That would have been in 1966, and an aunt of mine was getting rid of her Austin A35 at the time and buying a new VW. So I took the A35 from my aunt, put the MG in the garage and just taxed and insured the Austin.

When I got the A35, we took to it quickly enough. It was a matter of necessity, but there were also certain advantages because it was a saloon and if it was belting down with rain, you didn't have to worry about putting up the hood and side screens. I think as a family we appreciated moving from the MG to the A35. And that was just the start, because I was classed as an essential user so I could get an interest free loan, and I would get a new car every two or three years. (I started off as a school teacher, but spent most of my career looking after adult education in Kirklees. At the time this was a free-standing service and very rewarding, but sadly now there is no money to support it and adult education has become virtually extinct.)

Meanwhile the MG was just left to sit in the garage, and for years I fought with my family who said: 'For goodness sake dad, get rid of that old car from the garage and make room for your decent one.' But I didn't get rid of it because I had so many memories tied up in that car. I always said that when I retired, I was going to do it up and run it again. I finally retired in 1989, but my wife became ill with motor neurone disease around the same time and sadly didn't live long enough to ride in it again. She died in 1994, and spent the last two years in a nursing home. I would go and visit every day, but at night I started to work on the VA in the garage. It was a long process to get the car finished and I had a lot of the work done for me, but at the time I was glad to have a project to manage.

My objective was to restore the car to the condition it would

“I still get a great sense of pride when I open the garage doors, even after all these years”



Above: The Wilsons toured Scotland in the VA towing a caravan.

Right: Geoffrey and Winifred with a slightly battered VA when it was the family's daily driver.

Below: George Wilson with the VA today, a car that holds so many fond memories.

Our thanks to Stuart Mumby for suggesting this feature and putting us in contact with Geoffrey.

have been in when it was first made. I've been obsessed with keeping all of the original equipment working, and there is a lot of it because as well as the equipment that MG fitted to the VA as standard, there were also a number of optional extras. The Jackall system cost about £19 for example, and you could pay extra to have Lucas P100 or Bosch headlights. You could also pay to have a Bray water heater fitted because until the 1950s, antifreeze was so corrosive that you had to drain the water out at night or put a paraffin lamp under the sump to keep it warm.

The Bray water heater is like a 40W immersion heater that goes in the hose to the radiator. You'd plug that into the garage and switch it on, but before the war all electric sockets had only two pins and you could reverse the polarity by putting it in the other way round. My VA had such a heater fitted (it was an extra 17s.6d) and it still works, but an electrician told me that if there was a short, it could mean that the chassis and body of the car would become live and because the car stands on rubber tyres, it would kill you if you touched it. That worried me a little, so I have not used it, but it is still there and functioning – there is a plug just below the steering wheel that looks like an old Morphy Richards kettle socket.

I'd like to say the car is now exactly as it came out of the factory. Unfortunately it isn't, because I've had flashers and reflectors fitted at the back. Also, the side screens are plastic rather than celluloid because you can't get clear celluloid now and it would be too dangerous anyway, plus the clock is more of a 72 hour clock than an eight day one because that needed to be repaired and the clock maker had to shorten the spring.



Superficially though, it is the same even though the VA has worked hard for a living. When I bought it in 1951, the MG only had five or six thousand miles on the clock, no more. I've since been round the clock three times! It is like the farmer's broom though – same broom, but new handle and new heads – however, the numbers are still all the originals.

Since the restoration I've run the VA all over the place on rallies in this country and abroad. In fact, it is an international concours winner – I've taken it to rallies in Germany, to Normandy, various SVW events, plus a lot of English concours events, and the house is full of cups and trophies.

I still get a great sense of pride when I open the garage doors even after all these years, but sadly I think my time behind the wheel is running out. I certainly won't be able to take it abroad any more because I can't get insurance. However, my son remembers this car from when he was a baby and comes with me on some of the rallies. I hope that when I have to stop driving, he will nurture the VA as well as I have tried to look after it for the past 64 years.

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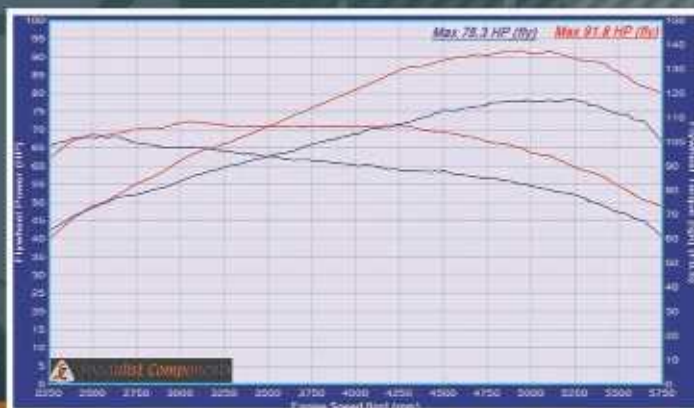
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Dinky's Magic Midget

A simple and extremely robust design ensured that this toy based on MG's record-breaking Midgets of the early 1930s was still being produced in 1956.

Report by Andrew Ralston

In 1931 the clipped, upper-class tones of the *Pathé Gazette* newsreel commentator reported excitedly that a 'Baby' car record had been broken at Brooklands, saying: 'Mr G. E. T. Eyston, in an MG Midget, beats Sir Malcolm Campbell's record for mile and kilometre with speeds of 96 and 97mph respectively.' Eyston went on to push the MG over the 100mph barrier – a first for a 750cc car. This Midget, EX120, was destroyed in a fire, but he had a new version built, EX127, which took the record to 120mph in 1932. This was followed the next year by EX135, based on a K3 Magnette and recognisable by its distinctive 'humbug' striped paintwork.

When Dinky Toys came on the scene soon after that, an Eyston MG was an obvious and topical choice as a model. And it must have been one of the best-selling Dinkies ever made, as it remained in production as late as 1956, meaning that children of the post-war generation could still buy a toy their fathers had been brought up with. Yet Dinky never identified it as an MG. In the catalogue it simply went by the vaguest of descriptions, 'racing car,' perhaps because it wasn't an entirely accurate replica of any one prototype. The consensus among collectors is that the model is based on EX127 with the addition of some elements of EX135, most notably the fishtail exhaust pipe.

The very earliest issue appeared in April 1934 and can be recognised by its open cockpit and four stub exhausts on the bonnet. Very soon afterwards, in December of the same year, a new version appeared with the side exhaust pipe and a driver – in reality nothing more than a round head! Another difference is that initially the model was cast in lead rather than zinc alloy.



Post-war issue of the Dinky racing car in silver and red, pictured with the original trade box as supplied to toy shops. (Photo courtesy of www.dinkysite.com)

It would be impossible to list here the multitude of colour variations that exist; suffice it to say that these were typically bright coloured, two-tone finishes with the lower body contrasting with an upper flash and circle on the nose. There's even an extremely rare striped 'humbug' version. A list of all the known combinations can be found in the standard reference work, *Ramsay's British Diecast Model Toys Catalogue* (www.ramsayspriceguide.com).

As with other Dinky Toys, production stopped during World War II, but the 23A Racing Car was back in the toy shops in 1946. When Dinky undertook a renumbering exercise in 1954, the model reappeared with the new reference number of 220 under which it continued to be sold for a further two years.

Gone were the vibrant pre-war colour schemes though, replaced by more subdued finishes, the commonest one being silver and red with a number 4 stencilled on the side.

Who knows how many thousands – or even millions – of these racing cars were churned out by the Meccano factory in Liverpool? Of all the old Dinky Toys, this is the one most likely to be found stashed away in a box of childhood treasures in people's lofts. The design was so simple that the toy was virtually indestructible, which is no doubt one reason why there are still so many around, albeit in well-used condition – unlike the examples pictured, which are complete with the original yellow trade box that once held six models. These were recently sold for £200 by www.dinkysite.com, which specialises in buying and selling rare vintage diecast models in mint and boxed condition.



It looks like a pristine pre-war example in red and cream, but this is in fact a rather crudely cast copy. For another modern replica of the pre-war Dinky, see next month's issue!



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Building a TF

In 2002, Roger Parker decided to trade in his old MGF for a brand new TF. Perhaps uniquely, he was offered the chance to follow his new car down the line as it was being built. This is what he saw.

Like many MG enthusiasts I was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the MGF in 1995, but for various reasons didn't buy one until 1999. In January 2002 I was coming to the end of my three year contract with the MGF, and the launch of the TF raised the logical question of whether I should pay the residual figure for the MGF or trade it in for a new TF. Following my positive experience with the new

TF at the press launch in Portugal, I decided to buy one.

My choice was a TF160 with the optional Sportpack 1 lowered suspension, basically because I found all cars to be equally firm riding, but

felt that the lowered suspension gave a better stance. I also chose to follow the colour scheme and trim of one of the press cars that had attracted me with its XPower Grey paint, light grey hood and Grenadine (red) interior plastics plus Alcantara and leather seats.

I have always been interested in the historical photos of MG production at Abingdon and how, many years after the images were taken, the detail in them can deliver so much useful information to so many people. I felt that this would be equally true for what was then current MG production at Longbridge, and as a result I requested permission to follow my car being built down the Longbridge production line. The following images give a condensed view of this process in action.



Roger in his brand new TF outside the upper entrance to the Heritage Motor Centre in Gaydon.



1

1. All new car orders were placed on the MG Rover DISCUS system, which showed all the details of the order and allowed dealers to track its progress and advise customers on the anticipated delivery date.

2. MGF and TF bodies were built by Stadco, through a very novel contract where that company shared the development costs of the body for a return on the sales of the cars, rather than being paid up front by Rover. Bodies were built in Coventry before being shipped to Longbridge...

3 ...where they were painted and stored in the upper area of CAB1 (Car Assembly Building 1) before being lowered onto the start of the first production line. The use of space in CAB1 was a work of art with intertwining conveyers as well as storage.

4. One of the first attachments to the car was this build sheet which listed all the detailed specification of the car so that correct parts and actions could be applied at the appropriate stations, which by the end of assembly saw all manner of stamps and labels being attached. I wonder whether these have survived?

5. Another early fit part was the fuel tank, which sits in a space between the passenger area and the engine bay. This area is later closed off from the passenger compartment by a substantial bolt-in steel bulkhead.

6. The main wiring loom was also an early fit before space became too congested. Note the very substantial cross beam tube that sits behind the fascia. On some early MGFs the welding on the ends of this tube was inadequate and it would move, creating creaks when driving.

7. The exterior body had protective panels fitted to reduce the risk of damage during production. These were a plastic moulding with a soft foam backing that was in contact with the body. Many workers wore soft gloves or mittens and many tools had soft covers for the same purpose.



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8. The gear change mechanism with the two cables attached was installed so easily on the line when compared to the time and hassle that is involved in changing just a single cable on the finished car, should one break or fray in service.

9. Here the EPAS steering column was being fitted, and already many other parts were in place such as carpet, handbrake, airbag ECU, heater and controls. Note that the cross tube carried steering mountings on both sides, so the bodies were not handed.

10. Whilst interior fitting out was being done, others were active in fitting out the front and under bonnet areas. Here the brake master cylinder, servo and ABS module were already in place, along with the radiator and so far just the one headlamp.

11. One of the few two man jobs at this stage was the hood fitting, which came in as a complete assembly so it only needed the frame to be bolted to the body. Note that the rear speaker assembly and rear deck insulation was already in place.

12. One man rear bumper fitting was done after the rear lamps were in place. Note also that the boot wiring had been threaded through between the inner and outer boot skins and that the only exposed part was secured to the left boot hinge.

13. The fascia assembly being fitted - note the instruments were already in place. This is actually not as difficult an item to remove as it may appear when the need to get access behind it arises. By this stage the screen frame interior trims were already in place.



9



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14. Seats arrived by conveyer that travelled through the roof section of CAB 1 to trackside 'just in time,' and this left only a few other parts to be fitted before the car came to the end of the first part of the TF assembly line.

15. From the end of the first part of the TF assembly line, cars were lifted into the roof section and stored until it was time for them to be conveyed automatically to above the start of the second part of the TF line...

16. ...which is where the main mechanical parts were fitted. Here at the beginning of the line, front and rear subframes were placed on accurately located jigs and then built up with suspension, steering, brakes...

17. ...engine, gearbox and most ancillaries. Interestingly this image was taken just after a hectic eight minute subframe change when one of the captive nuts in the rear subframe was found to be misaligned. The line was then restarted just in time before...

18. ...the body dropped from above onto the subframes which were then secured to the car. (Hence the common term 'Body Drop.') If only the subframe-to-body bolts would come out as easily now, especially the front ones that so often shear!

19. Wheels arrived trackside by one of the many conveyers, and when fitted they really did give a sense of near completion. Here the four wheel nuts were being automatically tightened by machine.



14



15

“Interestingly this image was taken just after a hectic eight minute subframe change”



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24

20. Once the wheels were on the car, it was dropped onto the line and for the first time the TF was sitting on its suspension and able to be rolled along the track. Here the interior door cards have been fitted, another element that added to the completed feel.

21. Fluids were added next, with brake, clutch and cooling systems all being filled using vacuum fill tools. The clutch master cylinder can be seen attached to the vacuum fill system here. Washer fluid was added by hand using a trigger-operated tap.

22. This was the engine ECU mapping station where a new ECU was placed in the docking port, a bar code scanned from the long paper record seen in image 4 ensuring that the correct mapping for the engine was loaded.

23. At the end of the line, all cars went through a rolling road check, suspension alignment check and adjustment.

24. Final quality inspections were done in a specially lit area where light came from multiple positions to make the area shadow free so that any imperfections

were easily seen. Then the car was subjected to a very wet water test.

25. Once any quality issues had been dealt with, the car was driven out of CAB 1 to storage, pending delivery to the dealer. I was lucky enough to be allowed to drive my car at this stage.

26. Once at the dealers, a car would be prepared and then presented to its proud new owner. Very often the dealer used to make an effort to create more of an occasion for the handover of new cars to private buyers.

25



26

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INSIDE THE BMITT ARCHIVES

The Heritage Motor Centre houses a fantastic collection of historic British cars, and most visitors spend all day in the museum's display halls (above). Yet the building also houses the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust's archives, an amazing resource housing a vast array of original production records, sales literature, publicity photos and more. We visit their Gaydon HQ to find out how the Heritage Certificates and Document Wallets that we all prize so highly are created.



© British Motor Industry Heritage Trust

The British Motor Industry Heritage Trust was formed in 1983 to safeguard the car collections that derived from the various companies that had combined to form the British Leyland Motor Corporation in 1968. Many of these vehicles are displayed in the Heritage Motor Centre in Gaydon, including unique MGs such as Old No.1, the Roaring Raindrop EX181 and a fully sectioned BGT from the 1965 Earls Court Motor Show. But as well as cars, the BMIHT also inherited a priceless collection of original documents and photographs, a collection that is cared for by the Trust's Archive Department.

The Archive Department is probably best known for the Heritage Certificates it has been producing since the 1980s, but these are just one of the many services they provide, so we start our visit by asking Richard Bacchus to tell us about the various documents available. 'Starting with the basic Heritage Certificates, these are certified copies of the factory build record for a vehicle and list all the information that we have for it,' he explains. 'They cost £42, but we also do a Premier Certificate for £54 where people can download a picture of their car and have that included – these are very popular with people who display the certificate with their car at shows.'

'We also do Technical Specifications for £31. We introduced these primarily for people trying to register their car abroad who required more detail than the Certificate provides. The Certificate is unique to an individual vehicle, but the Technical Specification is generic to the model at the time it was built. It

includes data on things like dimensions, weight, gearbox ratios, engine output and so on and can be very helpful when dealing with customs authorities and the like.

'All of the above can be combined with a Document Wallet for an extra £30. As well as being a great way to store your documents safely, the wallet comes with a copy of an appropriate period sales brochure taken from our archive collection, and a digital A5 photographic print of an original company publicity image featuring the relevant model. These were introduced as a great way of providing access to extra information and material that we hold in our archives.'

'Finally, because we used to be inundated with requests for information, we also introduced a web-based service via email that offers a single piece of information from a vehicle's build record, for example a date of manufacture or original colour, for £6. We will provide this within a day, and it is ideal for those who don't want a whole certificate or who can't wait the 28 days just to get a specific piece of information.'

Richard works in the Reading Room Office, part of the archive research team of five that includes Derek Tew, Jan Valentino, Hannah Sharp and Sharon Edwards. As well as compiling the data for Certificates, they also take care of people who wish to use the Archive for research. Anybody can come in and look at the books in the Reference Library without charge, but they can also access original archive material (including production records) if they book a week in advance. There is no charge for this service either, the requirement to book in advance is only to ensure that the relevant material can be booked out of the archive store and ready.

Ask most visitors about the Heritage Motor Centre, and it is the cars in the display halls (above) that they will mention. Yet some will know that there is an equally rich treasure trove of British history stored in the archives, behind the scenes but still accessible to everyone.



© British Motor Industry Heritage Trust

The BMIHT have production records for the following cars:

- Austin 1945-69
- Austin Allegro 1977-82
- Aston Martin 1949-85
- Austin Healey 1953-71
- Land Rover 1948 to present day
- Lagonda 1961-85
- Maestro & Montego 1983 onwards
- Metropolitan 1953-61
- Mini 1959-69 & 1977-81
- MG 1953-80 & 1993-95
- Morris 1928-71
- Range Rover 1970 to present day
- Riley 1953-69
- Rover 1945-86
- Princess/Ambassador 1975-83
- Standard 1945-63
- Triumph 1946-81
- Triumph Acclaim 1981-84
- Vanden Plas Princess 1959-80
- Wolseley 1901-31 & 1949-75



© British Motor



LEFT: This beautiful Magnette publicity shot is one of thousands of images available to buy.

BELOW: The process of digitalisation has helped immensely with making delicate material more easily and more safely accessible, but the storage room for the original material is still a vast affair.

Some people visit the Archive to carry out private research about their own vehicle, and such visitors are usually interested primarily in the build records. But the majority come to see other types of records, particularly business and sales material, because they are researching the history of the industry rather than individual cars, often for a university thesis or a book. As well as helping these visitors get the material they need, staff are also regularly asked by the police to provide vehicle information that can help them with their investigations, or to provide the US authorities with information on cars that people are trying to import – old Land Rover Defenders seem to be particularly frequent in this last category.

‘In fact we produce a lot of documents for people who are trying to import vehicles into new territories,’ says Richard, ‘particularly in Europe because one thing everybody asks for is a certificate of conformity but of course, if you’ve got a 1963 MGB, there is no such thing. However, we can produce the documents that will satisfy the authorities in place of that.’

You will also have noticed from the list on the preceding page that the Archive’s build records for MG start with the TF in 1953. Fortunately owners of some earlier MG can head in the direction of the MG Car Club who hold records for Triple-M cars, T-Types and some – but not all – Y-Types. (They can only search by chassis number.) In many ways it is amazing to think that so many records have been kept for so long – back to 1901 in the case of Wolseley! Compare that to some other

happen with ledgers, but on microfilm you never know what happened – did he not bother with that page, did he drop it on the floor or spill a cup of tea on it before it was photographed? The microfilm was just the company’s way of fulfilling their record-keeping obligation without having to cope with storing the bulky paper records.’

Fortunately the original MG records were preserved in much better condition. We had a look at the MGB build data and found it recorded in impressive aluminium-bound ledgers, with all information neatly typed across. It is impossible not to be drawn to the first ledger, so we had a look at the entry for MGB 101, which recorded such information as colour, date off test, off rectification, off body line, date despatched, account invoice date and more. The later MGB records contained even more information – in the mid-to-late 1960s you got gearbox numbers, axle numbers, commission numbers and so on – but then they started getting lazy and stopped recording so much.

‘It is very interesting to see how, within what became first the BMC and then the British Leyland empires, each company retained its own corporate identity and you can see it in the way the records were kept,’ says Richard. He shows us what he means, pulling out a Longbridge Mini ledger – once again we are drawn to the first entry and this records that the very first Mini was despatched to a certain Mr Issigonis. The Mini ledger from Longbridge is a totally different format to the MGB ledger from Abingdon and records different information. It is all hand-written, but beautifully scribed and very readable. Richard then pulls out a Morris book which is different again, this time a lovely bound volume, hand-written but again beautifully presented.

‘It is also interesting to see how technology developed, and how it was not always an improvement on what had gone before,’ adds Richard. ‘For example, you saw how much information was recorded on the first Mini. During MkII Mini production, they started computerising the records at Longbridge. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s computer memory was ferociously expensive, so by the time you get to MkIII production, all they were recording was the chassis number, the chassis number prefix and the date of build. That’s all they recorded because they wanted to computerise everything, but in terms of data it was quite pitiful.’

There is no sign of such a parsimonious approach to data storage when we walk out of the Reading Room Office and into the Archive Repository where the original records are stored. This is a huge room packed with tall units nine shelves high. The shelf units are all on rollers so you can slide them together into a solid block to save space, leaving a gap down the aisle you want to visit. We can’t help noticing that the various shelves are marked as Low, Medium or High Priority, and are intrigued to learn that if there is a disaster such as a fire, that is the order in which records should be saved! The High Priority material would include build records because they are unique. Published material is a lesser priority because there is a good chance you could buy replacements if you had to.

Next stop on our tour is the Archive Office, where Gillian Bardsley, Jessica Burris and Lisa Stevens can be found cataloguing and looking after the archives. This is also where the Document Wallets are compiled. Lisa explains a little more about how the contents of a Document Wallet are put together, saying: ‘We have built up digital files for all the different marques. On the whole we have a good bank of images we use, but it does happen occasionally that we get a request for something that has not yet been scanned and catalogued. There are boxes and boxes of images, a mix of press and general publicity photos, and you then have to search carefully through them to find what you need. Many are in colour, and we do try to give colour when we can. I print that up onto photographic paper, and the research team will make and issue the certificate.’

The sales brochures are also scanned and catalogued by marque. When a request for a Document Wallet comes in, they have to find the appropriate brochure for that model and year. As we talk, there is an MGA on Lisa’s computer screen that is a



Industry Heritage Trust



marques who were ruthlessly quick to dispose of records once the legal requirement to maintain them had lapsed. Where, for example, does the owner of a 1970s Ford Escort go for paperwork if they want to import the car into another country?

Not all the records are in good condition, although this has largely been overcome in recent years by the process of digitalisation. The Triumph records, for example, were particularly awkward to use because until recently they only existed on microfilm and some of the images were very hard to read. All of the Triumph microfilm has now been digitised though, so not only is it easier to read, but the originals have been taken out of use and sent for conservation to prevent any further deterioration.

However, Richard can remember the days of using the microfilm. ‘You can tell that they were done basically with the mind set of: *Who’s ever going to want to look at these again?*’ he laughs. ‘The earlier the record, the harder they were to deal with. Occasionally you had to admit defeat because the image was so over-exposed it was just a white blob. You sometimes also found that a page was missing entirely. That doesn’t



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
In the Reading Room library. A Heritage Certificate. Motorgraphs website has thousands of pictures. MG's post-1953 build ledgers can be viewed. Fragile negatives are carefully preserved.

very unusual shade of green, and this prompts us to ask whether they try to match the image to the customer's car. 'We do look at the order and try to match the images,' says Lisa, 'but it is not always possible.

We also try to find the brochure that will give the best reproduction for the customer. Some of the brochures are quite small, but others are more meaty and run to several pages. This one for example has lots of nice images, as well as plenty of technical details and a specification sheet.'

Jessica then takes us to the photo store. This is quite closely environmentally controlled because the negatives are fragile and susceptible to changes in humidity and temperature. They are kept in a special room, with a double-door airlock to get in. Once inside, the Cowley collection is particularly impressive, containing as it does a lot of the earlier pictures on glass plates still in the original factory boxes. 'But we are gradually moving them over to acid-free boxes which are kinder to the negatives,' explains Jessica. 'The Cowley collection is very well catalogued, but it can still be hard to find exactly what you are looking for because you are dependent on the descriptions given by the original photographic department.

'We've also got movie films in here, a lot of moving images that have been transferred to DVD and which people can license from us too. And out in the main storage area we have the microfilm. Scanning them onto the computer has helped make them easier to read because you can adjust the density, but some are still pretty hard to decipher.'

Clearly the BMIHT can only produce certificates for people's cars if they have the records, but they also have lots of sales brochures for other models, kept in acid-free sleeves and acid-free boxes. And of course people can come to the Reading Room to look at any of the material that is accessible (most things are available, though there are some things containing personal data which can't be shared). Tracking down the items you want to see is helped by the fact that 70% of the archive is

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Certificate Number:	201320006
1. Make & Model	STANDARD FLYING EIGHT TOURER
2. Car/Chassis Number	NA1826-74
3. Engine Number	Not Recorded
4. Body Number	34032
5. Specification	RHD, Home Market
6. Colour	(i) exterior Black (ii) interior Tweed
7. Date of Build	11 July 1946
8. Date of Dispatch	Not Recorded
9. Destination (Dealer's)	Not Recorded
10. Other Remarks (where recorded)	-
11. Details of Factory Fitted Equipment	Shipping headlamps, Mileage-tower speedometer
12. Other Information	The registration mark: HXC 138 (issued by post) was issued in London
13. Passed to	Walter Goldworthy
14. Date of Issue	12 April 2013
15. Signature of Authoriser	

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now catalogued on a searchable text database.

And for those still searching for that elusive picture, there is another route to finding it and buying a copy from the comfort of their own home, as Gillian explains. 'We also have a website called Motorgraphs [www.motorgraphs.com] where people can see a selection of the images that we have and buy copies in various sizes and formats,' she says. 'They can also contact us directly if they can't find the picture they want on the website. If they tell us what it is they are looking for, we will have a look and if we find something, we will then add that to the website so that they can buy a copy.'



The Heritage Motor Centre can be found at Banbury Road, Gaydon, Warwickshire CV35 0BJ. It is open daily from 10am-5pm, but will be closed from 30 November 2015 to 12 February 2016 inclusive. Entry costs £12 for adults, £8 for children (under fives are free). The museum's comprehensive website is at www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk, and you will find more information on the Archive Department under the relevant tab. The department can also be contacted directly via email at hmcarch@heritage-motor-centre.co.uk or by calling 01926 645076.

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MG MGB roadster (RHD) Pull handle model. £15,995

1964 (C Reg) 61,000 Miles Manual Petrol. A superb 1964 MGB pull handle Roadster finished in Tartan red with black leather/red piping and wire wheels. Documented history file. Thousands of pounds spent. Over £800 spent with Richard Lackford Engineering including 1986cc Fast road engine polished and balanced fitted with a 714 camshaft and a Overdrive gearbox @ 53000miles, now just 61,000 miles. Over £1800 in total spent between 2010 & 2013 on re-commissioning work and restoration work. Professionally repainted in 2014 by specialist classic bodyshop. Imported from Arizona USA back in 1995 bills and mols to date, recent new tyres (5) petrol tank and mot. Heritage certificate. A superb touring MGB. Outstanding condition would make a superb showcar.



MG TF 135 Style pack (The 2nd from last made) £7,995

2011 (11 Reg) 35,000 Miles Manual Petrol. LOOK !! This is the 2nd from last TF135 ever to be made. Chassis # D0001155. This is a Style pack model (top of the range) which included full black leather sports seats, silver interior trim, 16" Twisted pepper alloy wheels, the TF was also fitted with softride suspension, glass heated rear screen, engine water level sensor, remote boot opening. The 2011 model car had larger folding doors mirrors. Full service history and Immaculate would be a superb showcar.



MG TF 135 Spark + Hardtop (just 29,000miles) £5,695

2005 (54 Reg) 29,000 Miles Manual Petrol. A very low mileage Spark Ltd edition facelift model. Previously supplied by us @ 23722 miles now just 29,000 miles, full service history plus bills, Recent cambelt/water pump service. The Spark is a high spec model, fitted with sports pack 2, chrome packs, black leather sport seats with grey alcantara inserts with MG logo, engine water level sensor, wind deflector/fog lights etc. this one also being fitted with a colour coded removable hardtop, soft top has a heated glass rear screen, soft ride suspension, upgraded vented/grooved brake disc and new bushes all round. In April 2014 this MG had the underbody cleaned rust treated and wax oiled/rust protected at a cost of £720. Immaculate condition. Just awaiting valet.



MG TF 160vvc Sprint Ltd ed(just 18,000miles) £5,295

2003 (53 Reg) 18,000 Miles Manual Petrol. A very very low mileage and rare TF160vvc Sprint Ltd edition, having covered just 18,000 miles, pre reg by dealer for 5 days and one owner since. Fitted with sports pack 2, black leather sport seats with grey alcantara inserts, smokestone cockpit, chrome packs, fog lights, wind deflector, Just going though our workshop and having a service new headgasket / cambelt / water pump



MG TF 135 Full leather (just 25,400 miles) £4,795

2005 (05 Reg) 25,400 Miles Manual Petrol. A very low mileage TF135. Previously supplied by us in 2010 at 21,000 miles now just 25,400 miles. A very good spec 'TF' fitted with full unmarked black leather sport seats, silver pack interior including console, wind deflector and mudflaps from new. Supplied with full service history, we will carry out a cambelt service before delivery. Outstanding condition.

JUST A SMALL SELECTION OF OUR STOCK



MG TF 135 Pre-production Car (just 28,000miles) £3,995

2002 (51 Reg) 28,000 Miles Manual Petrol Finished in: Trophy Blue A very rare MG one of the first made TF's a Pre-production model TF135, chassis #D000133. Built the 20th December 2001 and registered 9th Jan 2002 as a MGF, body plate also shows it as a MGF. The MG TF Production line (for selling to the public) starting at chassis #D600160. Supplied with Full main dealer service history (9 services), MG owned until July 2003 and then one lady owner since. Outstanding condition and very low mileage a very original MG even down to the MG/Rover number plates, a real part of MGF/TF history.



MG TF 135 High spec+Hardtop (just 41,000miles) £4,395

2003 (03 Reg) 41,000 Miles Manual Petrol. A very low mileage high spec TF135. Huge spec fitted which includes a colour coded removable hardtop with a unmarked blue soft top, Black and blue leather sport seats, 2 tone leather steering wheel, 16" alloys, chrome grilles, fog lights, mudflaps, wind deflector. Having covered just 41,000 miles with full service history 11 services, plus new headgasket/cambelt/water pump earlier this year and less than 1,200 miles since, with bills. Immaculate condition



MG TF 135 Spark Ltd edition. £3,995

2005 (05 Reg) 69,000 Miles Manual Petrol. Spark Ltd edition. These were the last Ltd edition model made by MG/Rover group and are high spec, eg sport pack 2 with 4 pot red calipers and unmarked 16" 11 spoke alloys, Black half leather with grey alcantara inserts, chrome packs, silver interior trim and steering wheel, wind deflector, Unmarked 'Spark' salt & pepper hood. We have just serviced this TF and fitted a new headgasket/cambelt/water pump/stainless water pipes and moted. A superb condition Spark.



MG MGB GT (huge documented history files) £3,795

1981 (W Reg) Manual Petrol. Here we offer a Fast road MGB GT. This car has 3 massive history files all mols since 1988, all bills since 1991 and a hand written diary from 1991 to 2010 detailing all works undertaken on the car. Engine rebuilt to 1868cc stage 2 lead free head pipe 270cam, duplex timing gear, uprated suspension, stainless exhaust, plus lots more, light grey leather seats/interior, LE front spoiler, body also restored all under 10,000miles ago. MGCC members car. We also have a set of Minilite alloys available.



MG MGF Rare 1995 car (the 1137 made) £2,695

1995 (N Reg) 70,000 Miles Manual Petrol Finished in: B.R.Green/black Here we offer a very early MGF the 1137 product car made (chassis #D001388) and registered in November 1995 so 20 years old this year. Having covered just 70,000miles with full MG main dealers service history. Extras include power steering and Abs braking. A very original car throughout with original hands books, stereo etc, superb condition including bodywork and interior. Just going though our workshop and being fitted with a new headgasket/water pump/cambelt and new mot. A future classic MG, or is it already!

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Mark Andrews reports from Shanghai on his impressions of the new GS, after testing one built for the Chinese market. The GS will be modified before going on sale in the UK next year and so we really must emphasise that this is not a test of a UK-spec vehicle. However, we bring it to you as an interesting look at the vehicle on which the Longbridge engineers must weave their magic.



MG may have been the UK's fastest growing brand in 2014 with sales growth of 361% thanks to the successful launch of the MG3, but it has to be remembered that this was coming off a very low base figure. What matters is whether the company can sustain high growth figures or not, and one of the most important elements of

getting people into the showroom is having more than two models for sale.

A lot of enthusiasts are looking for a halo car to inject some much needed excitement into the brand revival. This is unrealistic when you look at the situation in SAIC's home market of China. Firstly there is very little demand for sports cars at the cheaper end. Brilliance tried some years back with its half decent Hyundai Coupe competitor, and failed dismally. NAC also failed just as spectacularly when they tried introducing

the MG TF in 2008. Chinese brands are also fighting a losing battle against foreign brand cars from joint venture production.

SAIC, who picked up the IP rights to the Rover 25 and 75 and then took over rival Nanjing Automobiles to bring MG back into the fold, were off to an early head start when it came to producing competitive cars. Unfortunately the monolithic state owned enterprise (SOE) has rather squandered this lead, which today lies with private companies

The MG GS in China



Geely, Great Wall and to a more debatable extent BYD. Even when it comes to the SOEs, SAIC is losing out to Chang'an, and if it doesn't watch out will soon be eclipsed by BAIC who bought the IP for the old Saab 9-3 and 9-5.

Against this backdrop, the MG GS is an incredibly important car for both MG the brand, and parent company SAIC. The hopes of the company ride on the broad shoulders of the first ever SUV to carry the octagon badge. The GS needs to not only get people into the showroom, but plonking down deposits as well.

Styling

It is not easy to make an SUV distinctive, but MG seems to have done this with the GS. A thoroughly modern looking car, it is still very much a part of the modern MG range. In the front it is more similar to the 6 than the 3, with a very similarly shaped light housing and vertical slats in the grille around the badge. There is a

skid pad at the bottom of the bumper, with the same material used to surround the fog lamps and LED running lights.

There is a strong shoulder line rising from just above the front wheelarch to the tail light cluster. At the bottom is a chromed running board, and on our Deluxe trim test car there were 18in wheels with aggressive looking alloys. Seven colours are offered for the body, including MG's signature colour in China of Birmingham Orange! Our test car, though, was decked out in a rather dull Misty Grey.

The back is the most controversial element of the design. With a lot of lines it will not be to everyone's taste, but it does give a unique look. First off the rear bumper appears quite high riding, and the boot looks as if it should start from above but actually incorporates part of the bumper. It is also not immediately obvious how to open the boot – the catch is above the numberplate on the bottom of the boot lid.

There is black outlining around the rear window, standard no matter which colour is selected for the body. At the top of the boot is a sporty rear spoiler, and there are also roof rails.

Engines

So far there has only been one new MG to get a petrol engine it deserved – the GT – and that isn't sold in the UK! At the time of MG-Rover's collapse, the K-series was nearing the end of its life in current form. Yet the 1.8T engine fitted to the 6 when it came to the UK in 2011 was little different other than the head gasket issue being fixed. This meant the 6 was overly thirsty and did not get the performance it deserved, something put right in my view by the new diesel unit even though many MG enthusiasts are resistant to the idea of an oil-burning engine in their favourite marque.

The 3 was the first MG to get a new petrol engine, and even this is on the underpowered



side and overly thirsty for its size. Luckily the MG GS puts all these problems to rest. In China there are two petrol engine choices: a 1.5 and a 2.0-litre, both of which are turbocharged. The 1.5T engine in the GS has no relationship to the unit featured in the stillborn MG5, but is the Cube Tech unit co-developed with General Motors. On the other hand the 2.0T was created by the SAIC Motor UK Technical Centre (SMTC UK). Both engines boast very good power outputs for their size, (up to 220 horsepower and a hefty 360Nm dose of torque for the bigger unit,) but with limited demand in the UK for larger displacement petrol engines, it is unlikely that the 2.0T will be offered when UK sales begin some time in the second or third quarter of next year. A more likely engine mix will be the 1.5T petrol and the diesel from the MG6, though as we saw in the Summer issue of MGE, SAIC are leaving their options open, saying: *'Variances may include engine size and type, as well as gearbox and drivetrain. Final specification of the UK market vehicle is currently being determined and further details will be released in due course.'*

The 1.5T offers 166bhp and 250Nm of torque, which for a car of this size is considerable. When the turbo kicks in there is a pleasing roar to the engine note. On the downside, although being more powerful than the 1.6T unit fitted to a Nissan Qashqai, the GS delivers both a slower top speed and worse fuel economy. Combined fuel economy is quoted at 42.8mpg for the front wheel drive version and 39.2mpg for the all-wheel drive. A start-stop system which would help reduce urban fuel usage is only offered on the 2.0T.

Interior

It's no secret that the 6 and to a lesser extent the 3 have both come in for criticism from the motoring press for the quality of the cabin materials. You would have thought MG would have learnt, but unfortunately the GS is again a let down. *[Do remember though that Mark is testing a Chinese-market GS, and that changes will inevitably be made before it comes to*



Europe – Ed] I collected my test car from a central Shanghai MG Roewe dealership, and while I was waiting I had a quick look around some of the other models. Sister brand Roewe can do decent quality interiors as shown by the 950 (based on the Buick LaCrosse) and W5 (based on the Ssangyong Kyron), which makes it all the more disappointing. In China the GS is available in four trim levels: Urban, Elite, Deluxe and Flagship. Hard plastics dominate the dash and the general look, while tasteful, is boring. Perhaps the GS is not the kind of car to benefit from MG3-style colour inserts in the dash, but possibilities could have included two-colour seats or at the very least red stitching!

Other than the Urban model, all versions get at least a six inch touchscreen infotainment system, but that does not include a reversing camera or sat-nav. On AWD versions this is replaced by an eight inch unit incorporating Mirrorlink, which allows a driver to link their mobile phone to the system and operate apps. In China this comes with SAIC's InkaNet 4.0 system, which operates in a similar way to the OnStar system just launched by Vauxhall in the UK and comes with a 24 hour manned support

Benedict Cumberbatch is the face behind the GS's sales pitch in China.

centre. Also incorporated is a reverse camera with dynamic guidance, and a sat-nav system.

Deluxe and above get leather upholstery and a power-operated driver's seat. There is a choice of black or beige for the seats, but the dash remains black no matter which is selected. In the rear there is plenty of space and the seats fold down to near flat, but the bench does not come up. The boot floor and surrounding walls are very sturdy, and there is a useful compartment under the floor and above the spare wheel.

On the move

Unlike Benedict Cumberbatch who could *'do it all day'* in the MG GS's Chinese advert, we were given an unsatisfactorily short time driving the car. The British actor may have had his GS bouncing down British dirt tracks, but in urban Shanghai there was no real way of testing the GKN Driveline-developed all wheel drive system. This system is available in China on the





Deluxe trim 1.5T and standard on the Flagship 2.0T. Only the latter though is fitted with a hill decent control system. All wheel drive is on demand according to the conditions, which are monitored by the car's sensors.

Even the 1.5T is able to give the GS good performance and brisk acceleration. No figures are quoted, but it is likely to be well under 10 seconds for the sprint to 100km/h. SAIC claim under eight seconds for the front wheel drive 2.0T, with a Chinese source stating 7.9s. The 1.5T is available with either 6 speed manual or 7 speed dry dual clutch automatic transmission. Our test car was fitted with the automatic unit, which gave seamless shifts on a par with those in Volkswagen's DSG system. Unfortunately there are no paddle shifts, these only being offered on the 2.0T's 6 speed wet dual clutch system.

One of the biggest problems when first driving the GS is the brake – there is very little travel in the pedal which means you end up

applying far more braking than intended. While you do adjust for this, it is still annoying and hopefully something that can be fixed before the UK launch. Another thing that will need looking at is the electric power assisted steering. As is typical on Chinese cars the steering is overly light, albeit not to the normal extent experienced over here. Having said that, there is a reasonable amount of feel and precision in it, although it will still require tweaking.

The Urban gets 16in wheels, the Elite 17in and the Deluxe and Flagship 18in. Thanks to the generally straight nature of inner city Shanghai roads it was difficult to gauge the handling other than that it seemed reasonably composed. The ride was also fairly smooth, though going over a stretch of corrugated road gave considerable vibration in the cabin. No doubt Andy Kitson and his team at Longbridge will be able to make the suspension more suitable to UK tastes and road conditions.

Conclusion

Having driven all the new MGs bar the GT, I believe without doubt that this is the best yet. It might not be a sports car, but it is a sports utility and with its perky engine and smooth gearbox it has the potential to be a lot of fun. Hopefully the Chinese management will let the UK team implement the changes necessary to make it competitive in Europe. If that is done, they will most likely find that a GS with a better interior will see greater sales in China as well.

Equipment levels will also need to be considered. Currently only the Flagship gets six airbags, the Urban and Elite only two. Many competitors get features like warning systems for the blind spot or lane departure and head-up displays, but these aren't even offered as options. Yet prices in China start at just under £12,500 and go up to just over £18,500. If the GS can be offered at prices close to this in the UK, the company will be onto a winner.



Mark Andrews is a British freelance writer based in Shanghai, China. He has been doing test drives and covering the Chinese car market since 2007 and has paid close attention to what he calls the MG Roewe story. Mark has had articles in Autocar, Auto Express, Sydney Morning Herald, South China Morning Post, Silkroad, Discovery, China Automotive Review and GN Focus amongst others.



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Q&A

Have you got a technical problem with your MG? If so, the combined expertise of Roger Parker and the MGOC Workshop may be able to help. For details of how to access this free service, see information box on p77.



Roger showed how to convert an MGF to Suplex suspension in the August 2011 issue of *MG Enthusiast*.

Is Suplex the answer for me?

Q I have bought a low mileage MGF Trophy and want to keep it indefinitely. My wife complains about the harsh ride though, (the fact that I have had it pumped up to raise the car by half an inch to make it possible to get in the garage might be a contributory factor here), and I am also concerned about the long-term supply of Hydragas units. I'm prepared to pay to have the Suplex conversion fitted, but have read some bad postings about knocking noises etc. Could you tell me if the kit has now been improved to address these issues? Also, can it be fitted to the Trophy as I am quite happy to have a raised and softer ride, or is it more complicated than that?

A The kit is basically the same as it was originally, except for minor improvements, especially in damper settings. Noise is not common to the design, but if any noise within the suspension is generated from existing components, then it will be more apparent with the Suplex kit fitted. This is for two reasons.

Firstly the original Hydragas system has the suspension piston rod connecting between the knuckle pin that sits in the suspension top arm

and the displacer. In the displacer there is a machined alloy piston that is connected directly to the piston arm, and suspension movement is transmitted into that alloy piston which in turn sits against the lower rubber diaphragm within the displacer; behind this is the Hydrolastic fluid. This dampens out any noise and vibration transmitted up the piston shaft. When the Suplex units replace the displacer, we now have only metal components within the Suplex unit and no noise dampening of any consequence occurs. Additionally the metal canister can act as an echo chamber, resulting in some noise that was present before any conversion but not heard now becoming noticeable.

Secondly it is not uncommon for there to be wear in most cars' suspension as even the youngest MGF is now 14 years old and the oldest is now passing two decades of service. As a result it is reasonable to expect there to be wear within existing suspensions, and by far the most common source of noise after fitting the Suplex is wear in the original knuckle joints which can now be heard whereas before it was damped out. The usual problem is that the nylon material which the steel pin and lower slider plate sit in becomes stressed, wears and can become softened. This allows excessive movement between the pin and slider, so they generate noise when coming back together.

The front is more prone to this noise-generating condition occurring because there is far less preload on the suspension due to the front of the car being relatively light. My own experience showed that I had to renew both front knuckle joints, and noise which had increased quite considerably was reduced by around 95%, leaving only occasional sharp drops over specifically harsh traffic calming or especially bad potholes hit with too much speed still generating a clunk.

It is also the case that after the vehicle has been raised on a jack and the suspension fallen into full droop mode, you will need to drive through a settlement period of a few miles before the suspension resumes its previous loaded state, and during this period some more clunking can be present. Again this is almost exclusively from the front for the same reason of the front being relatively lightly loaded.

Damper settings have always been the most sensitive aspect of the conversion as the MGF body is NOT designed to take significant damper loads. That is why the standard MGF dampers have no damping action in the primary compression mode, and only significant damping in the rebound phase – the standard car's primary damping is done within the displacer. (Note that any MGF fitted with replacement dampers that have significantly

increased primary compression damping control, or are adjustable to give this, will sooner or later break up the body around the rear upper body damper mountings.) The Suplex dampers have been honed to a point where the settings provide sufficient primary compression damping to be able to give good stability and ride, with the vast majority of the damping done on the rebound as per the standard dampers. The ride quality achieved with the Suplex kit is very good (in some areas better than a new MGF was), and infinitely better than any MGF where one or more displacers has lost some or all of its pressurised nitrogen gas, which is the unit's spring medium.

Turning now specifically to the MGF Trophy models, these were always very hard riding because they had an individual specification of displacer designed with much firmer internal damping settings. The external dampers fitted to these models were actually the same standard units as found on the mainstream MGF models. They did have minor additional strengthening to the damper body mounts, but the differences are minor and the same guidance regarding damper settings and body damage is almost equally applicable. Body strengthening plates are available from MG specialists that can be welded into the car in a similar style to that used on the MGF Cup race cars (but not quite to the same degree) should the owner desire to have a Trophy quality hard ride if fitting a Suplex kit (or adjustable hard settings for any standard MGF for that matter). Trophy displacers have been effectively extinct for some time even in secondhand form, so any Trophy owners suffering from displacer problems usually have the simple choice of not using the car in the hope of finding a replacement Trophy spec displacer, converting the car to standard MGF displacers (all four), or going Suplex, with the latter two giving the standard and comfortable ride quality.

A good indicator that a displacer has lost its nitrogen gas will be a much harder ride, so that means a Trophy goes from a ride that can remove tooth fillings to the only suspension being the flex in the relatively thin tyre sidewalls, AKA go-kart levels. On a standard MGF the ride becomes harsher than a Trophy was originally. If, when the suspension ride height is checked and then brought back to the correct levels (368mm front/ 363mm rear for standard MGF, 348/343mm for Trophy) and you have noticeable discrepancies between front and rear, if the system pressure is at a nominal 400psi then any displacer that is sitting low has

TF damper bolts

Q I remember reading in your *Postbag* pages a while back about a problem with a damper securing bolt shearing on a TF and causing extensive damage. I didn't pay too much attention at the time because I didn't own a TF, but now I have bought one... However, I can't find the letter in my back issues. Could you remind me of the gist of the problem and the best advice for making sure it does not happen to my car?

The letter you are referring to was in the May issue's *Postbag*, and came from MG specialist Steve Hall. In it, Steve said: *'We have just had a TF brought in with the rear suspension collapsed. On removing the rear wheel, it would appear that the bottom shocker bolt sheared causing the driveshaft to shear plus some other damage - not a pretty sight and expensive, plus the availability of parts is not good. And all for the sake of a £2.50 bolt! Perhaps owners of higher mileage cars might want to check this bolt has not worked loose, and maybe consider changing it?'* Roger also has the following comments to add on the subject - Ed



A I have recollection of a recall in early 2003 for early TFs (and the TF I owned at the time was one of those recalled) relating to torque relaxation of the bottom damper-to-suspension arm for both front and rear. In simple terms 'torque relaxation' simply means the bolts have come loose! A loose bolt will shear due to the shock loads it has to absorb that it was never designed to take. I do not think that any cars will still be running around with this problem as a legacy of its build on the production lines, but it is quite possible that issues today will come as a result of work done on the suspension - this is an area which does attract many to work on as they look to soften the ride on early cars, and many TFs are now of the age that routine replacement of worn parts will be necessary. On that basis alone (not to mention simple good practice) I think it would be wise whenever doing work on the suspension or carrying out routine servicing for owners to check that the bolts are tight.

probably lost some or all of its nitrogen. If the car sits level and low and rides like a go-kart, then it is quite possible that all four displacers have lost their gas.

The rapidly dwindling stocks of good, serviceable displacers to serve the market to keep MGFs on the road will create (or has already created) an issue whereby the options are that the car is taken off the road and broken for spares - as is all too common today with the value of the cars being so low - or the owner looks to any long term alternative and the Suplex steel spring conversion route is currently the only viable one to follow.

The prospect of any future remanufacture of

displacers is I think nonexistent for two reasons. Firstly the Dunlop tooling was destroyed some years ago following the end of displacer manufacture, and secondly the rapidly reducing number of cars (including other cars using Hydragas where a replacement unit could cater for these too) and their stupidly low values simply means that no sensible business person could ever make a business plan work to remake tooling and go into limited production in these circumstances.

One other thing to note with regards your car is that the Suplex kit is adjustable, so you can set your car to Trophy or normal ride height without altering the harshness of the ride.



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THE MYSTERY MIDGET

David G. Powers discovered that all was not quite as it seemed when he bought a yellow Midget off the internet, but did he let that spoil his fun?

‘Well, we’ve spent money on stranger things,’ I said to my wife Lorrie over the telephone, now that we were the owners of a bright canary yellow 1970 MG Midget MkIII, a car that other than in a few photos we had never even seen before. Proud owners? Well, that was yet to be seen.

Sometimes you just get in a car buying mood. Before the arrival of the Midget, our stable of British iron consisted of a 1974 MGB GT and a 1968 Austin-Healey Sprite. The GT has a near zero-time engine (I rebuilt that myself) and a completely sorted suspension, but the body is currently a work in progress which means that it will be off the road for quite a while longer. The Sprite

consists of a very decent bodyshell and several boxes containing the rest of the parts. So, in other words, none of our British fleet is operational.

I have been puttering around with British sports cars since I was 16 – a 1968 Sunbeam Alpine was my first, followed by another Alpine, a couple of MGs, and the odd Triumph or two – and I truly missed the driving experience. Since the recent demise of my 1971 MGB GT, a daily driver that even in the sub-freezing winters of the American Midwest never failed to start, I have had to gratify my sports car requirements by driving a 2001 Mazda MX-5 Miata, a great car to be sure but just not quite British enough. My wife, a past owner of an MG Midget, while not possessing the same level of

fervour that I have for the breed, does enjoy the occasional spin around town in a British machine.

I am a commercial pilot, and a couple of years ago I was flying a gig out of Miami, Florida. Between flights I would log onto eBay and surf the British car listings. Although I was certainly in the mood to

buy a car, I didn’t want to spend a ton of money, nor did I want to buy another project as I had enough of those already. Neither did I want an over-priced, over-restored example that I simply parked in the garage and looked at. What I wanted was a reasonably priced, intact machine that we could drive right away. The car





didn't have to be perfect, because after all one does like to tinker from time to time.

I zeroed in on a 1970 MG Midget. In the pictures it was a nice looking car, bright yellow with wire wheels. It was described as: *'Runs well, drives great.'* Of course, you can't really detect rust all that well in a photo, nor hear a strange clunking noise in the rear end, nor see the smoke from a tired engine. Still, this Midget was located in Atlanta, Georgia, not far from our home town of Pensacola, Florida, so at least the logistics concerning the sale would not be a problem. I called Lorrie, who logged on. There we sat, me in Miami and Lorrie up in Pensacola, 660 miles apart, looking at the same car. I asked her what she thought about adding another car to the fleet, to which she replied: 'Go for it, start bidding.'

She's a great wife...

At the end of the auction, we were the new owners for the not unreasonable price of \$3250. I must say that after all the excitement of bidding had ended, a feeling of trepidation began to settle in. I had never before bought a car sight unseen. Had I simply gotten caught up in the spectacle of the auction? The astute Midget enthusiast, by looking at the accompanying photographs and without reading any further, will right away notice a bit of a quandary with the car. More on that later.

During the auction, I had spoken many times with the owner, asking several questions about the car. He was not really a dyed-in-the-wool British car aficionado, but I felt he was being honest. He was simply one of those people who bought a British sports car



because they looked fun, but later lost interest. Still the question was, had I just bought another project car – or worse? The car was, after all, bright yellow – had I just bought the proverbial lemon? Well, I am a big boy, and like it or not, I would pay for the car that I'd promised to buy.

We met the former owner in Montgomery, Alabama, and I must say that I was pleasantly surprised with our new Midget. It had undergone a complete restoration in the early 1980s – by another owner – and over the ensuing 30 years, most of the work had held up quite well. Although the interior was showing a few signs of age, the body was virtually rust free. It fired right up with no puffs of smoke, and ticked over nicely. The subsequent 150-mile drive back to Pensacola showed a rather noisy first gear, a somewhat lackluster performance and a loose

steering rack, but notwithstanding the usual creaks and groans – from the Midget, not me – it performed well. So no rust, no clunking and no smoke; so far, so good.

Now for the quandary. After the flush of new ownership abated, a bit of uncertainty arose. Being the owner of an Austin-Healey Sprite I was reasonably familiar with Midget history, including the Round Wheel Arch (RWA) versions of the early 1970s. As can be seen, our new Midget is a RWA example. It never even occurred to me prior to the sale to check and see if the year and chassis number were appropriate for a RWA Midget, and as it turned out they weren't. The mystery of our new Midget began to settle in.

A number of theories presented themselves, as I tried desperately to convince myself that I hadn't just bought a stolen car. It's one of the oldest





tricks in the book – switch out the paperwork of a wrecked car to a stolen car, then sell the stolen car with its new identity. After the car is re-registered and a new Certificate of Title is issued, everything is now clean as a whistle. It's a classic, albeit nefarious, manoeuvre that has been used for years.

Of course, the first people to contact with a problem like mine were the great folks at the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust (BMIHT). Soon the heritage certificate arrived, but this did nothing to dispel the mystery. The colour, interior and wheels were all wrong. Actually the data provided by BMIHT was most certainly correct, but for what car? Apparently, not mine. About the only thing that matched between our Midget and the data at the BMIHT based on the chassis number was that both cars had a cigarette lighter. Still, the colour, interior and wheels can be changed over the years, so I pressed on.

A less drastic idea than our Midget being a stolen car was that major bodywork repairs had replaced the wheelarches or even the entire rear portion of the car, both of which were without doubt viable suppositions. But digging around and under the car I found no evidence of any massive weld lines or any body filler. The bodyshell was one solid unit.

Then there is the theory that

the records kept by the company back then were not entirely accurate. This is not all that far fetched. As an example, several authoritative volumes assert that there were no RWA Sprites ever produced – except of course the original Frogeye. However, I found one original owner of a later model Austin Sprite that does indeed have RWAs. This particular car was built in June 1971. His correspondence with the BMIHT hints that it was possible that, during changeovers of model years, some bodies may have been built earlier or later than the year indicated by the Serial Number. So, it seems that at least one RWA bodyshell rolled out of the factory as an Austin Sprite, despite opinions to the contrary. Hmmm...

Bodyshells were often built en masse, only to sit around for a period of time waiting for the economies of the time to jump start demand for more cars. In this vein, one final theory (somewhat confirmed by published sources) is that when MG used the last square wheelarch car, rather than produce more since they knew they were going to the RWA, they simply started RWA production earlier than planned, but didn't change the records to show this. It's hard to say, but there is enough ambiguity in the records to make one wonder. At least that's what I told myself.

The Serial Number of our new Midget matches that of a car built towards the end of the 1970 model year, which concluded in August of that year. According to some of the books the RWA did not show

up until the 1972 model year, the first examples of which were actually built in October 1971. That would leave some 14 months – over one model year – between the build date of our car and the build date of the first recorded RWA Midget. Try as I might, I must concede that this would be just a bit too much of an error in the records. A month or two here and there yes, but over a year?

I finally settled on the theory that the person who did the restoration simply took a clapped out old 1970 MG Midget and transferred all the good parts, including the identity, to a later model but decent RWA bodyshell. Perhaps he did not know – or care – about the difference between round and square wheelarches.

The inevitable oily cardboard box of parts that came with the car contained a stack of photographs, apparently taken during the restoration, which would tend to confirm this theory. Maddeningly there are no notations on the back of the images, but there are a couple of photos of the restoration in progress where, in the



background, there appears to be, just maybe, a donor Midget. One photo does show a completely disassembled RWA bodyshell in primer. Clearly (hopefully), the restorer of the car took the body down to bare metal, which would explain why there is no evidence of another body colour other than the current bright yellow. What the photos do show is a rather thorough restoration process, which makes me happy and explains the fine condition of the body.

Also in the box was a pile of faded receipts, one of which has listed a rather cryptic notation for a 'Midget tub, w w conv,' from a Georgia junk yard. Perhaps it was for an entire bodyshell - the receipt being deciphered as: 'Midget tub, wire wheel convertible.'

Another receipt from a different vender simple states: 'MG Midget.' Were these two Midgets combined to make one good one? I don't really know. With various clues from these receipts I tried to track down the restorer, but unfortunately he passed away several years ago.

During my investigation I

contacted a couple of the noted US-based BritCar experts, repair and restoration shops specialising in the breed. Although they could not shed any more light on the subject, without exception they all said that I shouldn't sweat the details too much and that I should be happy I have such a good little Midget. One guy said that he was personally quite happy to know one more British sports car, regardless of its true identity, had been saved from the scrap heap, and advised me to 'Rock on.'

At first I was somewhat dismayed at not knowing the



exact lineage of my Midget, but that feeling has since gone away completely. Still, there are nay-sayers out there. One member of a local British car club even sniffed that since the identity of the car was in question, it was practically without value. What? I countered that assertion with the fact that what my wife and I actually have is an early 1970s-ish MG Midget that looks great, is a blast to drive, fun to tinker with, and a car that we are not afraid to drive in the rain. Unlike some, I never let the weatherman determine my driving habits.

Over the past couple of years, Lorrie and I have entered the Midget in a few of the local British car shows, mostly for the camaraderie of fellow British cars fans rather than for the actual competition. A very few people will walk by, look at the car and wrinkle their noses, whispering that the year is not appropriate for a RWA Midget. I really don't mind as the vast



majority of people comment on how it is a fine looking car – a very yellow car, admittedly – and a neat example of the type. I never shy away from telling these folks the story of the mismatched year/body style, simply calling it a composite restoration. Most seem to approve, and we have even won a few People's Choice trophies in the Midget/ Sprite class.

As can be seen from the photos, the Midget is in nice shape but with enough small details to keep an inveterate wrench turner like me occupied. The only mechanical projects have been a change of all fluids and a tune up, new front seal, the installation of a neat Moto Lita steering wheel and a decent set of seat belts, and of course tending to that loose steering rack. A good wash and wax revealed a still very glossy paint job, a pleasant afternoon painting the wire wheels did wonders, and a new carpet kit spiffed up the interior. Other than that the Midget has been a solid driver since we bought it. Now I'm tending to the usual oil leaks.

A final note: fans of vintage British TV will understand the license tag number. Sadly the tag number KAR 120C was already issued in Florida, hopefully to a Lotus 7.



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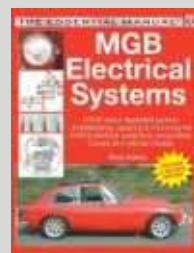
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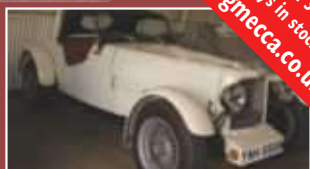
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There is an inescapable rule that says however much space you have for cars and/or parts, it won't take long before you have filled it. I was reminded of this rule by the arrival of my MG Metro as reported last issue. Despite having had the garage extended a few years ago, it was already full (as per the rule above) and if the Metro was going to have the covered accommodation its condition deserved, then something would have to make way for it.

One of the current toys is a Velorex tricycle, not as small as you might think but still smaller than a full-grown car. I did experiment with turning that sideways so that I could squeeze the Metro in as well, but that would have left me no room to work on anything.

So I decided to put the BGT up for sale. This was a slightly scruffy car that would require some body repairs in a couple of years, but it drove really well. For a fully-functioning BGT with a long MoT I could have asked more, but I thought that £1450 was a reasonable point to start haggling. Plenty of other people thought along similar lines and said it was cheap, but unfortunately none of them were in the market for a BGT and so it remained unsold.

At this point I was tempted to keep the B, arrange some off-site storage and just stick the Velorex in that until I was ready to start its restoration. There were a couple of flaws in

this plan, though. For one thing, secure vehicle storage of any kind is far from cheap and I have plenty of more interesting things to spend my ill-gotten gains upon. And for another, although the running costs on the B are minimal, I knew that eventually I would succumb to temptation and start to restore it. That would then soak up a whole new world of time, effort and money.

As I was weighing up the options, fate stepped in and made the decision for me when I mentioned to Kelsey's Managing Director, Phil Weeden, that I was trying to sell the B. Kelsey publish a whole range of magazines alongside *MG Enthusiast*, and Phil thought that the B could provide both interesting transport for staff and some MG feature material for the other titles. When I said he could have it for £1000, he nearly bit my hand off.

Of course that was a lot less than I had been hoping for, but the issue is not quite as clear

cut as that. For one thing, I knew that the B could win friends and influence other staff to the MG cause. (So far I've had several comments along the lines of: *'It's not a great looker, but it drives really well. And it was so cheap! I could have told them that...'*) Also, the B is still accessible if I need to borrow it back for a specific event. I shall be doing just that later this month when I take it on the Wigton Motor Club's Solway Historic Rally in Cumbria – look out for a feature in due course – so in some ways I could view the price difference as £450 well spent on my part, effectively buying both storage and passing the running costs over to somebody else. It's better to have a glass that's half full than one that is half empty, isn't it?

So that leaves me with a saloon car bias on the MG front. The ZT has passed its MoT again with nothing worse than a bulb that blew during the test, so that will hopefully be good for another year and

10,000 more miles of comfortable cruising despite living permanently outside. I am even thinking of fitting a tow bar to it because I quite fancy getting a little Eriba Puck caravan for weekends away, something the 2.0 diesel should take in its stride.

The Metro has its permanent space in the garage, and I shall use that regularly but sparingly to keep within the 3000 annual miles specified in my insurance. It will be looked after but not mollycoddled, and indeed I took the pristine red beauty on an autotest recently, the story of which will feature next issue. It is sharing garage space with the Velorex, a 1946 Standard Eight Tourer resto project that has maybe another year left to run, and a Herald convertible interloper from the Triumph stable that harks back to one of the first cars I bought as a teenager. The only question now is how much longer I can resist the temptation to get a TF, and what will have to go to make room for it!



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MG C GT 1970, Blue. Body restoration/respray a few years ago, new chrome wire wheels, full Webasto sunroof. Engine sounds lovely, drives without any problems. O/D gearbox, Black/White piped interior, new seats and carpet. **£13,500**



MG B GT 1973, Teal Blue, Heritage Shell Rebuild approx 12yrs ago, only 11k miles since, O/D gearbox, new chrome wire wheels, electronic ignition, parabolic rear springs, MOTs and Service records. Rebuild cost in excess of £18,000. **£12,500**



MG B Roadster 1972, Primrose Yellow, Navy Blue interior. Wooden steering wheel, O/D Restored 5yrs ago. Service history. MOT's date back 30yrs. New hood, brand new Chrome Wire Wheels. Excellent bodywork and paintwork. Rust free engine compartment, Rebuilt engine. **£11,500**



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MG B GT 1973, Red, Navy blue interior, new carpet. Body restored with new inner & outer sills, floorpans, wings, full respray. Rebuilt unleaded engine, New exhaust, Wire wheels, O/D gearbox. **£8,500**



MG B GT 1972, Bare Metal Respray Dec 2014, Black, O/D, 15inch Minilite style Alloy wheels, 195/60 tyres. Mechanically has the standard 1800cc engine with O/D gearbox. Black leather seats, excellent condition, New chrome bumper and front valence. **£7,500**



MG Midget Mk3, 1971, 1275cc. Teal Blue, Heritage Shell Rebuild approx. 10 years ago, still rust free, New interior, Brand new hood Aug 2014, Ivor Seale rebuilt Engine and gearbox, only 7,000 miles since rebuild. **£7,500**



MG B GT 1968, British Racing Green. Restored bodywork in lovely condition. Engine rebuilt 10 years ago, documented and itemised record of servicing and maintenance, 30 years service history and MOTs, fitted with overdrive. **£6,500**



Austin Healey Sprite Mk4, 1970, 1275cc. Restored bodywork. Similar model to MG Midget Mk3 fitted with the 1275cc engine. Engine, gearbox and rear axle rebuilt 2 years ago. Drives exceptionally well, New rear suspension, Black interior, new hood and wire wheels. **£6,500**

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1965, £4,600. Just MoT'd. Full history, this car is as the photograph says. Newry And Mourne. 07922 586705 (SN)

MGA

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1960, 56,000 miles, £24,995. Same owner since 1971. Very original car in speedwell blue, never restored. Original leather seats. 43 years of MoT Certs. Always dry stored and kept in running order. Drives beautifully. Probably the most original MGA you will ever see. 01388 451493 (BM)

MGB

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1972, £2,500. Bare bodyshell, engine, overdrive gearbox, carbs, front and rear axles done, over £2,000 spent on new parts. Lincolnshire. 01652 688004

BGT

1974, £1,200 ono. Restoration project. One of the last genuine chrome bumpers. Some work has been done, sills, etc. Most panels and parts with it. Good winter project. Cambridgeshire. 07982 854837 (RB)

GT

1967, £3,975. Rare Mk I older resto. Black interior/red piping. O.D. box. Paint needs tlc. Tested Nov 15. 2 excellent door shells inc. Loads new parts fitted. Consider Moggy/Mini in px. Staffordshire. 07999 486141 (RB)

MGB GT



1974, £7,950. Factory V8. Leather interior. Full history. Chrome Bumpers. The car starts and moves and is mechanically very good. Bodywork requires renovation. Exciting Project. Lancashire. 07980 336922 (SN)

MGB GT



1970, £2,775. Black. Lowered suspension. Bumpers removed. Sebring valances fitted. Stainless steel mesh grill. Minilite wheels. New tyres. New discs. Green pads. Cheshire. 01515 100843 (PB)

MGB GT

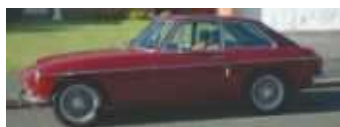
1976, £2,200. Colour yellow, 11 months MoT. Full length sun roof. Overdrive, good all round condition. Essex. 01621 817743

MGB GT



1981, 40,000 miles, £3,500. VGC, all solid, standard and original. MoT April 2016. Drives great, well maintained. Selling due to lack of space. Engine excellent, overdrive smooth, good tyres and exhaust. Britax sunroof, Stereo and 6CD. Reasonable offers accepted. Leicester. 0116 259 7264 (SN)

MGB GT



1981, 56,500 miles, £4,750. Damask red. Bodywork & running gear restored by Welsh MG Centre. Gold seal engine. Only 4000 miles since. Paperwork, bills. Always garaged. Owned since 1997. MoT till June 2016. Cheshire East. 01270 664965 (SN)

MGB GT



1977, £3,500 ONO. MoT June 2016. Black piped red interior. Recon diff. New rear springs / Spax shocks. Drilled and grooved discs. Green stuff pads. Good strong engine. Reluctant sale. Good runner. South Yorkshire. 0114 247 4453 (SN)

MGB GT



1978, 77,700 miles, £3,250 ono. MoT 11 months. Excellent Runner, original running gear, with overdrive gear box and a sun-roof. New parts include, suspension, alternator, distributor, battery and tyres, s/s exhaust, body work restored. Burton-On-Trent. 01283 565543 / 07882 637290 (SN)

MGB LE ROADSTER



1981, 88,000 miles, £7,850. A1 Condition, a total of £7,000 spent on restoration work only 3,000 miles ago. New fittings, Kenwood radio/cd, hood & frame, uprated f/discs, abs rear shocks, prop shaft, tyres, motalita st wheel, windstop, elec ignition, full waxoyl treatmeant, rebuilt, resprayed bodywork etc. Bedford. 01234 740057 / 07831 372763 (MC)

MGB ROADSTER



1978, 72,000 miles, £4,195 ono. Long MoT. Wire wheels. Overdrive. Exchange motorcycle, cash either way. Phone for more details. Hants. 07826 873933 (PB)

MGB ROADSTER



1979, £3,750 ono. New hood, new leather seats and carpets. 9,000 miles since engine rebuild. New hoses, water pump. Much money spent. One year MoT. Do not expect concours condition. Hampshire. 07415 220655 (PB)

MGB ROADSTER



1972, £8,000. Tax free. Recent restoration with photos. Wire wheels. Garaged. New front tyres. May consider part exchange. Rubber bumper model or any vintage or post vintage vehicle. MoT April 2016. Cornwall. 07852 450181 (PB)

MGB ROADSTER



1972, £9,750. Very pretty car having had restoration, lovely solid bodywork, smooth gearbox with swift overdrive comfort contour seats, drives and sounds great. jonre@hotmail.co.uk (SN)

MGB ROADSTER



1980, 79,000 miles, £2,300. Rubber bumper, pageant blue. Work is required on the wing and body work. Rostyle wheels, need refurbishing (have kit for this). Mechanically sound, MoT until October 2014. Has had new boot lid, fuel tank, piston rings, exhaust and carburettors. Tonneau cover included. Sports steering wheel fitted but have the original. Radio. Untaxed but previously used daily. Offers considered. Kent. 01474 350394 (SN)

MGB ROADSTER



1964, £8,595. Tartan red, pull handle, wire wheels, overdrive, chrome bumpers, metal dash, only 3 former registered owners. looks beautiful. Bolton. 07708 804699 / 01204 789657 (SN)

MGB ROADSTER

1971, 9,000 miles, £10,000 ono. Heritage re shell, BRG, oil cooler, over drive on 3/4 gears, dry running only, garaged and covered, all panels wax oiled, MoT one year, paper work and receipts for shell and everything available. Oakley. 07813 102142 (SN)

MGB ROADSTER



1975, £4,750 ONO. Well looked after, new hood, new clutch. MoT June 2016. Brought from MG specialist for retirement but unfortunately a year on and cannot drive anymore. Needs a loving owner. Herts. 07593 077828 (SN)

MGB ROADSTER



1972, £8,000 ONO. Black leather int. New 12 volt battery. Re-spray last year. Kenlowe fan. Electric ignition. Wood / ali steering wheel. New tyres and tubes wire wheels. Always garaged. Essex. 01255 428532 (SN)

MIDGET

MG MIDGET



1978, £2,500. Dark green with new hood and radio. Excellent mechanics and bodywork. Tax and long MoT. Lots of history. Ready for summer. A great little car. Birmingham. 07818 033737 (MC)

MIDGET



1967, £5,095. Mk III, 1275cc, Teal blue, chrome bumpers, MoT. Perfect investment. Bolton. 07708 804699 / 01204 789657 (SN)

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MIDGET

1978, £5,500 ono. 1500 cc, taxed and tested until June 2016, complete body restoration, full respray, new engine 500 miles ago, brakes, pipes, fuel tank and exhaust are new, excellent condition, hard and soft top. Lancashire. 01706 229952 (SN)

MIDGET



1973, 132,000 miles, £3,000. Bronze yellow, s/s exhaust, minilite alloy wheels, major rebuild 89/90, 1380cc howley head fitted, valuation certificate 3,200 pounds, professional maintained, great looking affordable classic. Gloucestershire. annspe9@aol.com (SN)

MIDGET 1500



1977, 105,073 miles, £2,495 ono. MoT to April 2016, rebuilt engine runs on unleaded, new roof, had a fortune spent on it, in good condition, ready to go, little bit of history, receipts to show. Yorkshire. 07973 533651

MIDGET 1500



1978, 88,000 miles, £2,750 ono. Condition 2. Bright Vermillion Red. 12 months MoT. 30 years service history. Great fun to drive, a reluctant sale. Gloucestershire. 07796 767478 (SN)

MIDGET MKII



1965, £1,250. Dry stored 20 years. All welding done. Easy restoration. Many new parts. Derbyshire. 07836 605110 (PB)

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MGF & MGTF

MGTF



2003, 21,000 miles, £5,000ono. Finished in Solar Red. Sold with fitted wind stop, glass HRW, steel spare wheel and private plate. Second car use only. Fantastic condition. Must be viewed. Warrington. 01925 230388 / 07775 624582 (SN)

MGTF



2004, 34,000 miles, £POA. 1.8 135, Low mileage, immaculate. 54 plate in metallic grey. Garaged since brand new. MoT'd. Just had new ball joints and suspension arms on the front. North Yorkshire. 07531 464543 (SN)

MGTF



2005, 2,300 miles, £5,295 ono. In Sonic blue. Lovely condition. With chrome Lexus lights. MoT November. Old bills, MoTs and service. Door pockets. Good wheels, tyres. Staffordshire. 01782 723503 (PB)

MGTF



23,000 miles, £4,895. 1.8 135 2 door convertible. Orange metallic. Full service history. Electric windows. CD/radio. Cam belt. MoT July 2016. New tyres. West Sussex. 01903 879553 / 07866 500354 (PB)

MGTF



2008, 18,038 miles, £5,750. In stunning red, leather seats, air con, reversing sensors, glass rear window. MoT February 2016. The car is stunning- history & 2 keys. West Midlands. 07803 240148 (SN)

MGTF



2002, 60,000 miles, £1,595. Black, MoT February 2016, alloys, black leather interior, good hood/back window, remote CD player, MG Club owner, head gasket and cambelt done, 2 new back tyres, vgc for year. Notts. 07968 071950

MGTF LE500



2008, 15,500 miles, £6,250. Only 50 in vibrant orange. Standard LE spec plus smoked rear lights. Drives as new car. New MoT. 01494 488906 (SN)

TF



2010, 26,195 miles, £8,250. 85th Anniversary Limited Edition, White. 1 owner. The car is in excellent condition. 26195 miles. FSH. Serviced 20/03/15. MoT'd until 24/03/16. 2 keys. New battery 03/15. The alloy wheels have just been refurbished 06/15. Lancashire. 01204 883985 / 07810 423904

TF135



2013, 22,000 miles, £7,500. Stunning Arctic white. Possibly the last built. Lovely condition. 7 months warranty remaining. Half leather, piano black trim. Garaged. Z+F remap. Black hardtop and stand included. Cornwall. 01579 348765 (PB)

RV8



£16,250. Low mileage, superb throughout, new adjustable ez power steering, adjustable Spax, polished wheels, hood/full tonneau, clear rear windstop, s/s luggage rack, other extras, serviced by RV8 engineer. 01989 567035 AFTER 5PM (SN)

MG Z-CARS: ZR, ZS, ZT

MG ZS TURBO



2004, 75,000 miles, £4,995. Diesel. 180 body kit. Pearlescent paint, red to gold. Stainless steel twin exhaust. Excellent condition. F/S/H. Private plate MG54 RON. Devon. 07772 757843 (PB)

ZR



2002, 111,000 miles, £325. 1400cc. On SORN plus no MoT. Failed on incorrect headlight image plus exhaust emissions, but no advisory. Was used daily till MoT. Now have firms car. Essex. 01702 622249 (SN)

ZR 160 VVC



2004, 38,000 miles, £2,300. Rare four door model with unusual and distinctive colour (firefrost red). MoT to August. Full service plus major work (ie head gasket, belts, tensioners, water pump, waxoiled) carried out by ZR specialist in August 2013 (done less than 3k miles since then!). Bedfordshire. 01525 875001 (SN)

ZS 120



2004, £1850 Ono. Only 2 keepers, only 26k from new MoT May 2016, ex cond throughout with a couple of scratches. Part SH, 4th car so little used, garaged. Recently waxoiled underneath. 07928 114798 (SN)

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Next month in **M&G** ENTHUSIAST



First time resto BGT turns out to be a cheeky devil



On track at Donington with Jack Goff in an uprated MG3



Ex-Team Longbridge MGF is still on the campaign trail

PLUS

Metro Autotest

The editor and his new MG Metro are thrown in at the deep end

Mechanix Midget

How youngsters from Islington learnt how to restore an MG Midget

MGA Coupé

A car that looks standard at first glance, but repays closer scrutiny.

Big Farina

A rare survivor from the MkIII/MkIV Magnette family finds a new home

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XPAG Specials take their rightful place

MG specials are increasingly being recognised as a key element in 1950s racing, and quite rightly so as the XPAG engines provided readily available and reliable power.

The appearance of the ex-Dick Jacobs MG Y-Type Coupé of Stuart Dean and the evocative MG TC Special of Simon Evans at the Goodwood Revival again brought the Specials era of MG very much to the fore. While Stuart Dean's car has been a welcome regular in historic events these past few years, the first major outing of the TC-based Special at Goodwood was not only a fitting culmination to the achievement of both its owner and its builder Phil Cornut, but a long overdue tribute to George Phillips who campaigned the original MG TC Special at Le Mans in 1949 and 1950, finishing class runner-up with co-driver Eric Winterbottom on its second appearance at La Sarthe. In 1951 he would return to Le Mans to race the special-bodied TD UMG 400 whose appearance predated the MGA, but he must also be remembered as the chief photographer for *Autosport* magazine.

One of the engine choices for individual special builders along with its Ford rival, the XPAG unit would memorably power the Lotus 6, Colin Chapman's first production car, its countless successes including Peter Gammon defeating the Works Porsche 500 at Silverstone in 1954. The Cooper Car Company would also turn to MG power after a brief foray with Vauxhall, and the Cooper-MG became a successful competition sports car. But it was with Lester that MG-powered cars achieved their most memorable successes with the cars of The Monkey Stable. At Goodwood, where surviving cars have been regularly seen at the Revival meeting, came their greatest success, taking the Team Prize in the first Nine Hour Race in 1952.

The MG Car Club T-Register has surely been the prime mover in the revival of interest in the MG XPAG Specials, their increasingly comprehensive displays at MG Live! raising the profile of these

fascinating cars that made such a contribution to 1950s motorsport. Where else would we have seen such cars as the one-off Parson-MG or the JB Special? And no mention of them would be complete without reference to Stewart Penfound, XPAG Specials Registrar, whose research, ownership and competition of a Lester-MG has culminated in a supremely authoritative account of a fascinating period in MG history.



Lester-MG typified the sporting marques that chose XPAG.

Fond farewell to the mighty Vulcan

Nuclear bomber, maritime reconnaissance, air-to-air fuel tanker, ground display and crowd-pleasing favourite at air shows – the Avro Vulcan XH558 has had many roles.

By the time this issue reaches you, the last in a famous line of Avro bombers will have flown for the final time. No longer will the roar of the Olympus engines shake the ground as the huge delta climbs majestically in the sky – another part of our aviation heritage will be gone forever, only to be relived in film and video.

So, should this be a time for regret? Not

in my view, for we have had an Indian summer of classic jet flying which most of us feared would have ended with the Vulcan's 'last flight' into Bruntingthorpe as long ago as 1993. It was kept in ground running condition for a further six years until lottery funding and public donations enabled it to take to the air again in 2007 after a restoration masterminded by the Vulcan To The Sky Trust. Since then it has flown sparingly but regularly – funding always having been an ongoing concern – and drawn huge crowds everywhere.

This year I was determined to see her flying at Eastbourne for the final time and true to form, she drew the crowds to take her final bow. Her display was watched in silence – unusual for an air show – and as she flew away over Beachy Head there was sustained applause. This has been the story everywhere this year, just as it was last year when she memorably flew with the BBMF Lancaster and the Canadian Warplane Heritage Lancaster to make an unrepeatable Avro bomber trio. This year too the RAF has paid its own special tribute to the Vulcan when it flew inside a perfect formation of the Red Arrows at Southport. The Gnat Display Team also flew an escort alongside her at the Yorkshire Air Show. Memories are

surely made of this.

In so many ways Vulcan B2 XH558, The Spirit of Great Britain, has been an aircraft that has been taken to the hearts of the public. How many of us have dropped pound coins into its collecting buckets to help keep her flying, I wonder? Could she have continued to fly? Costs alone are just one aspect, airframe life is quite another. She has completed significantly more flying hour than any other aircraft of her type. It is worth remembering that she came down the Avro production line at Woodford in 1960, at the same time that MGAs were being built at Abingdon, emphasizing just how old she really is. Now, with the end of her flying career approaching, there will be no further technical support from BAE Systems, Marshall Aerospace and Defence Group and Rolls-Royce.

This is not the end for XH558, however. She is to become the heart of a new engineering inspiration centre at her hangar at Robin Hood Airport, Doncaster Sheffield. The good news is that she will still be able to light up her Olympus engines for the odd runway display. But for now, from every one of us who has marvelled at the mighty delta, it has to be thanks for all the memories.

Salute to Avro Vulcan XH558 in her final flying season.



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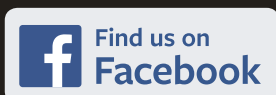
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